Gunnerkrigg Court

Chapter 50:

Totem




hahaha!
so, you have
enjoyed yourself
this summer?


I have!
She's been working really hard, these past six weeks seem to have flown by!
It's been so much fun having Kat here...
and why did you not bring her to see me?
this wonderful friend you always speak of!
Sorry, dear. Her parents said she wasn't allowed to come into the forest.
Bah! hahahaha!


ah! our guest of honour has arrived!
hello again!
did your friend come with you?
no! this is a private ceremony!
they have already said their good byes!
come along then!


tiny, delicious one, take a good look around!
you will never again see the forest like this!
you are headed to a smaller world!
a flatter world!
a world in which you will rule and shape as you see fit!
HAHAHA!
responsibility!
a fine word, and one of the last you will learn as a human!
well, let's hope we teach you responsibility, too!
let's not be biased, coyote!


Luckily for our friend, making a new body is easy!
fire head girl! even the court knows how to do it, yes?
yes... as I understand it, the court used a sample of her dna to sequence ~
BAHAHA!
meaningless!
bang two rocks together and you will birth a spark!
simplicity itself!
far more interesting is the next step!
even you can do it!
me?
yes! the part where we remove life from the rabbit!


when it comes to taking life, even my imagination is but a whisper amongst the trees compared to the thundering cacophony of human ingenuity!
oh, what a noise!
you can hear it in the grinding spin of the planet!
but there is one part humans have not figured out yet!
when you take a life, you let it escape!
poof! and it is gone!
but see here, I hold the mind, the will, the life of our friend!
even I, as wonderful as I am, cannot create this from nothing!


but I am able to pass it on.
to you.
take her totem to the court and they will complete the ritual when her new body is ready!
but... I've met some fairies who were going to become humans, and it wasn't done in this way...
oh? you've met some hollow fairies before their change?
they are handled differently. they are born with their minds and spirits already removed and waiting.
to pass the test, all they must do is wilfully destroy their bodies!
hahaha!


how cruel!
crueler still, to keep them separated from their spirits!
they are mere hollow vessels without them!
but... why are they born in this way?
hahaha! the court wants what it wants!
the court?
?!
coyote!
her... her body is still alive!


yes! it still breathes!
but it will never again leap through the bushes or burrow in the ground!
what... what will happen to it?
i will.... take care of it, hehe!
good day, fire head girl!




to tell the truth, without Georgie around, it was... well, kind of boring!
we got to spend the first couple weeks together, but then she had to go to her dad's
she's not back yet
couldn't she just... pop herself over to see you?
haha, we tried that, but she can't teleport that far in one go.
maybe there's a way around that .
so. . that's it, huh?
yes.


apparently there's a team of people that usually collects these spirit totems?
that's what I learned, yeah.
ysengrim delivers them to the edge of the forest
coyote made an exception to show me how it was done.
and?
as usual with coyote... it was a little unsettling.
ah! hello!


welcome, welcome!
so you're the new mediums, right?
ah! and you have the new transfer for us!
wonderful, wonderful, I know the case.
a rabbit, correct?
she was, yes.
well, this year's batch is almost ready!
still a few fairies left to complete their test, but they will all be ready soon!
batch?
oh my... that's rather insensitive, isn't it?


we only grow and transfer the students here.
It's easy to forget they become wonderful individuals!
come along, I'll show you!
here, you see!
fifteen fairies, and fifteen miscellaneous.
thirty new students in total!
and all the animals become male?
that's right! the court demands balance.
50-50 male/female split, you see.
and since all the fairies are female, that means the rest must be male!


here we are!
just place the totem in the receptacle.
this is... him?
what happens next?
when they're all ready, I'll perform a simple ritual.
it'll transfer their spirits into their new bodies.
you perform the ritual?
oh yes!
I learned it from my teacher, who learned it from coyote himself!


I heard you were going to take your rabbit friend back into the forest for a visit?
how exciting!
as a former animal, he'll need to learn to walk and talk first, but they catch on very quickly!
I'll let you know when he's all ready!
thank you for showing us around.
my pleasure!
excuse me but, were you a former fairy, or animal?
um... neither, I'm from Cardiff.


...
we were just in a room where they grow mindless children in metal vats ..
I think that's an appropriate response.
Is it okay that I'm kinda creeped out by this whole thing?


hey!

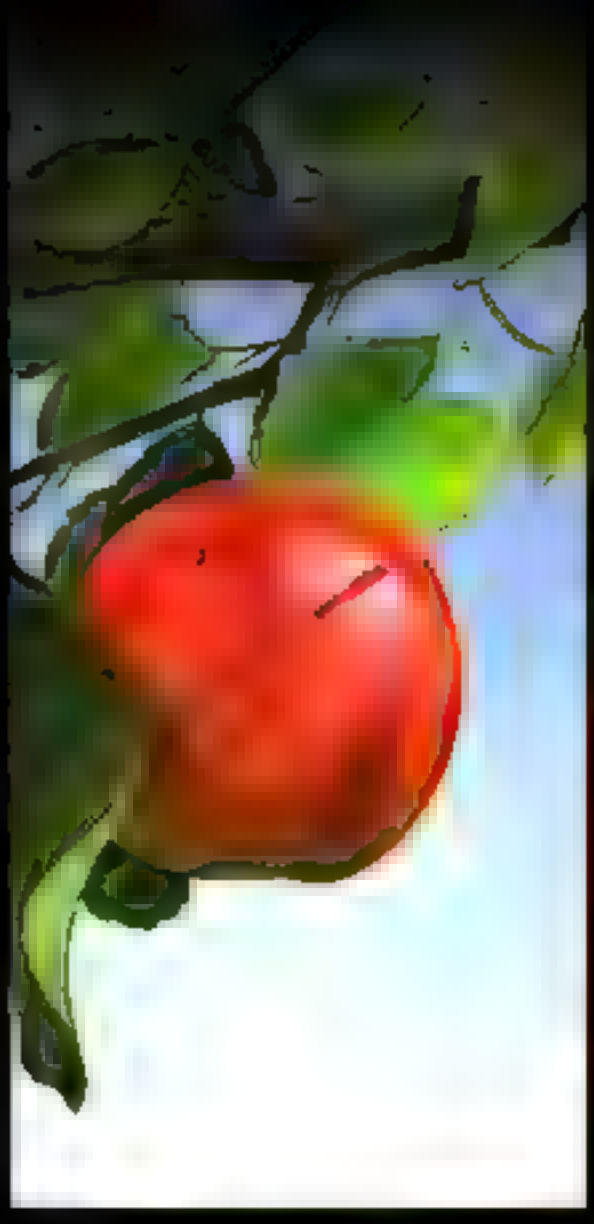

not working at the shop today?
I was just meeting with andrew.
I must say, sometimes the court
hello!
ah, paz! you're back!
how was your holiday?
oh, good, good. see the family, go to the beach same as usual!
she just got here!
the new dorms are so nice!
I'm sharing with margo on the floor below!
but I just had to come up and see kat!


well, don't mind me, I was just popping in!
oh, you don't have to leave...
haha, I was just about to check on Renard!
see you later!
could I be any more metallic?
how you subbing?
antimony!
must I live with these mechanical fools?!
19

Gunnerkrigg Court

Chapter 51:

The Tree




Mr. CARVER


I will be your biology teacher this year.
the syllabus is of my own design, and you will find it considerably more difficult, but ultimately more rewarding.
however, before we can begin
antimony.
go to the rest room to wash that ridiculous makeup from your face.
cosmetics are not allowed in my classes.
y-yes, fa... um...
sir.
yes, sir


the class will sit in silence until you return.


now sit back down.
you have delayed your classmates long enough.
we will begin with adenine, a component of the nitrogenous base m-
um... sir, you didn't give me the new book.
yes, I see that
now, to continue...
N


40 minutes later.
BRRRING
very good, that is all for today.
further reading is recommended on your worksheets.
antimony, please stay behind a moment.
I'll wait for you outside...

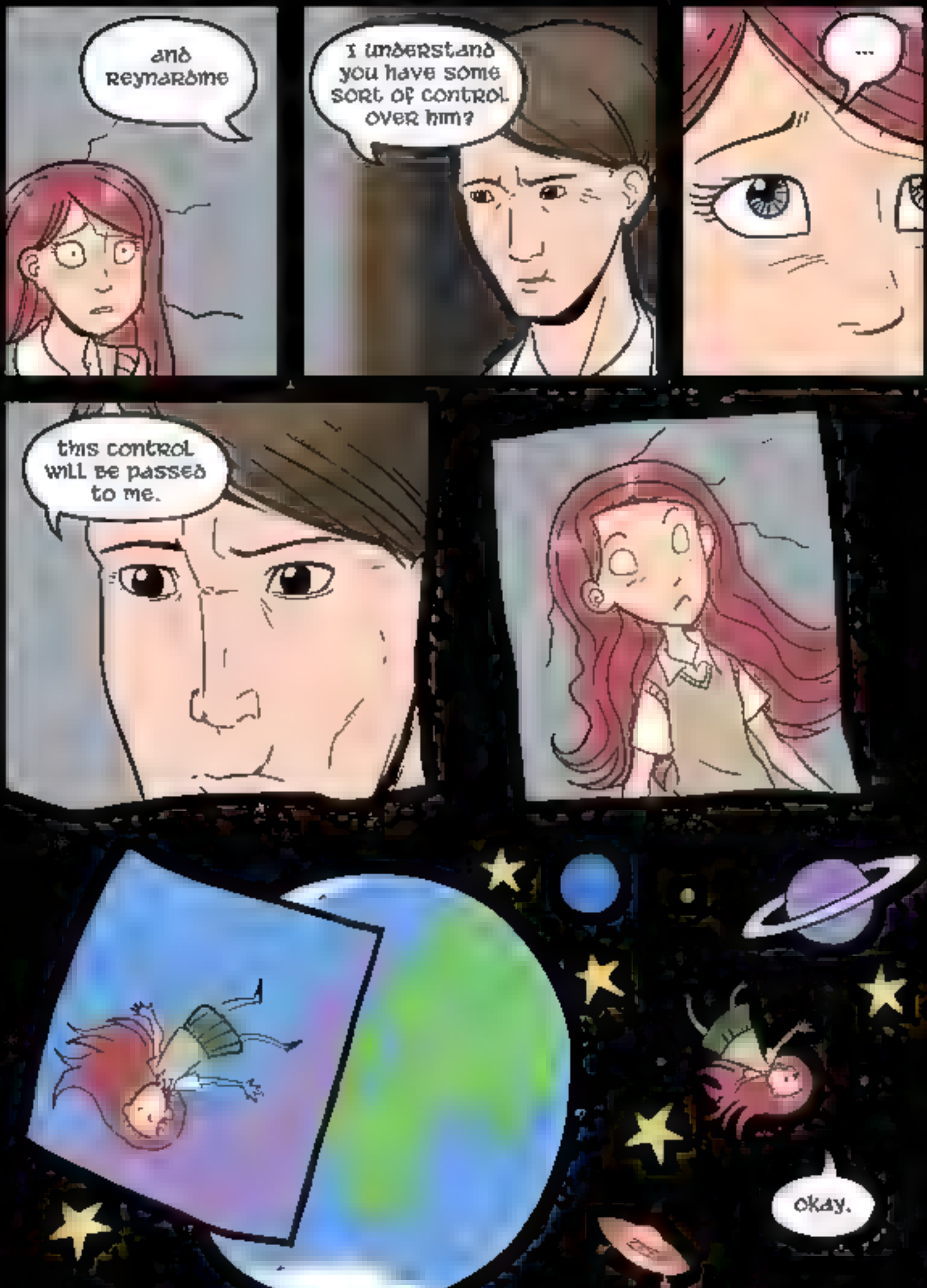

your hand!
what happened?!
is it your concern?
well... I should th... that.
Let me restate.
is it your business?
no.


antimony, I cannot say how disappointed I am.
your schoolwork at first appears satisfactory
in biology and history, your work is fine.
however, in almost every other subject it was discovered that you have been cheating heavily.
in particular from... katerma donlan.
on the rare occasion ms donlan would make a mistake, you would have the same errors
a clear sign you have been cheating.
do you deny this?
n-no.

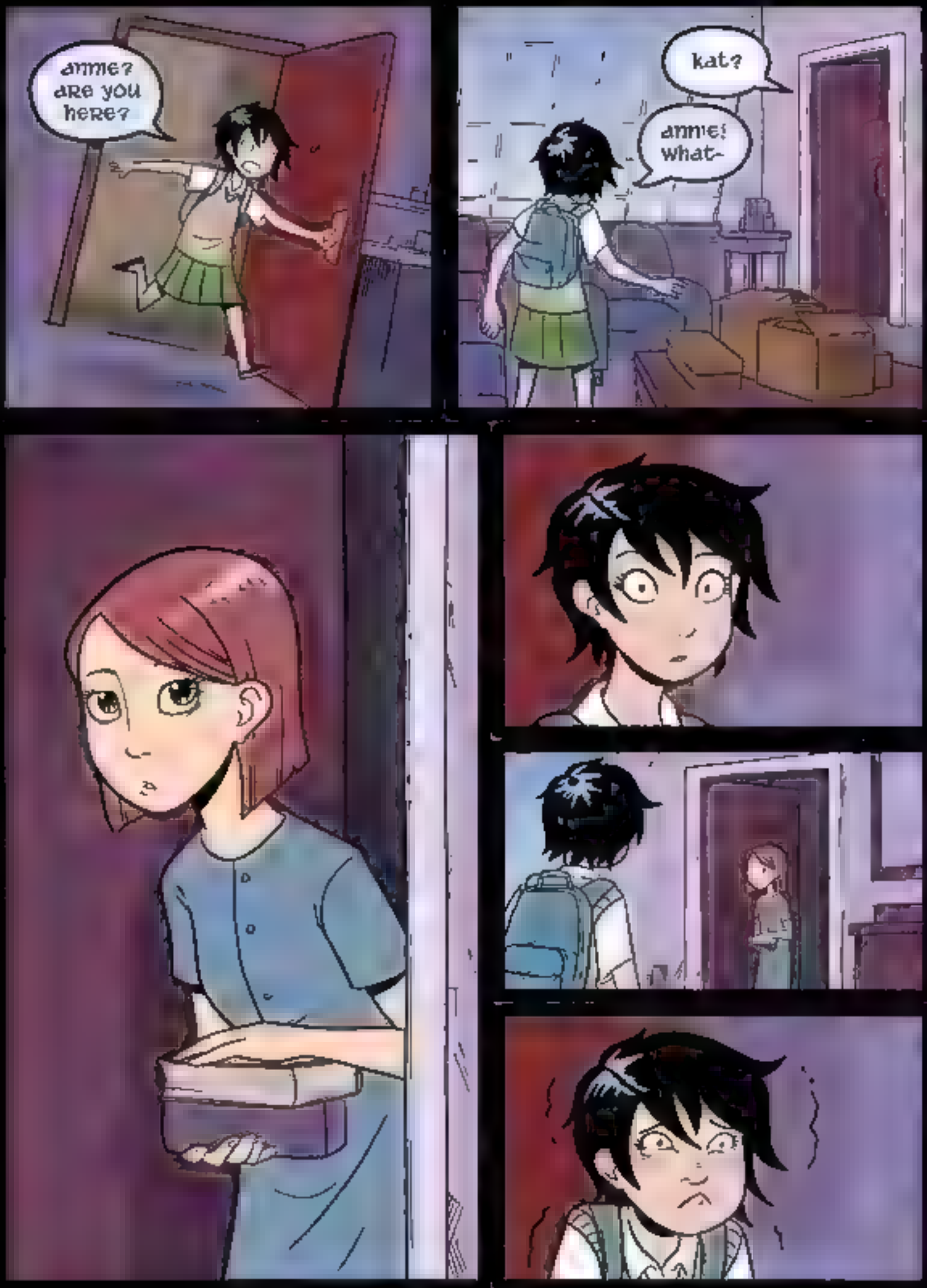

the court already knew about this behavior, but I will not let it stand.
I've examined all of your work and subtracted every instance of plagiarism from your overall evaluation.
because of this, I have made arrangements for you to repeat year 9.
what?!
you - you can't do that!
ms. donlan.
If you have been complicit in my daughter's activities, there will be consequences for you also.
no!
no! I copied from her!
kat didn't know anything about it!


oh, kat, I'm so sorry!
annie...
ms. donlan, will you please leave us?
antimony will not be joining you for the remainder of the day's classes.
I'll see you later...


this is an inconvenience for everyone.
as you can imagine, there are no available spaces in the year nine dormitory.
so you will be rooming on your own nearby
I - I have to move out?
less distraction will be better for you.
there is no need for you to retake biology and history, so those lessons will be dedicated to extra study.
further to this, all nonsense with the forest will cease. you are not to go back there.
but I work for-
no


and reynardine
I understand you have some sort of control over him?
...
this control will be passed to me.
okay.

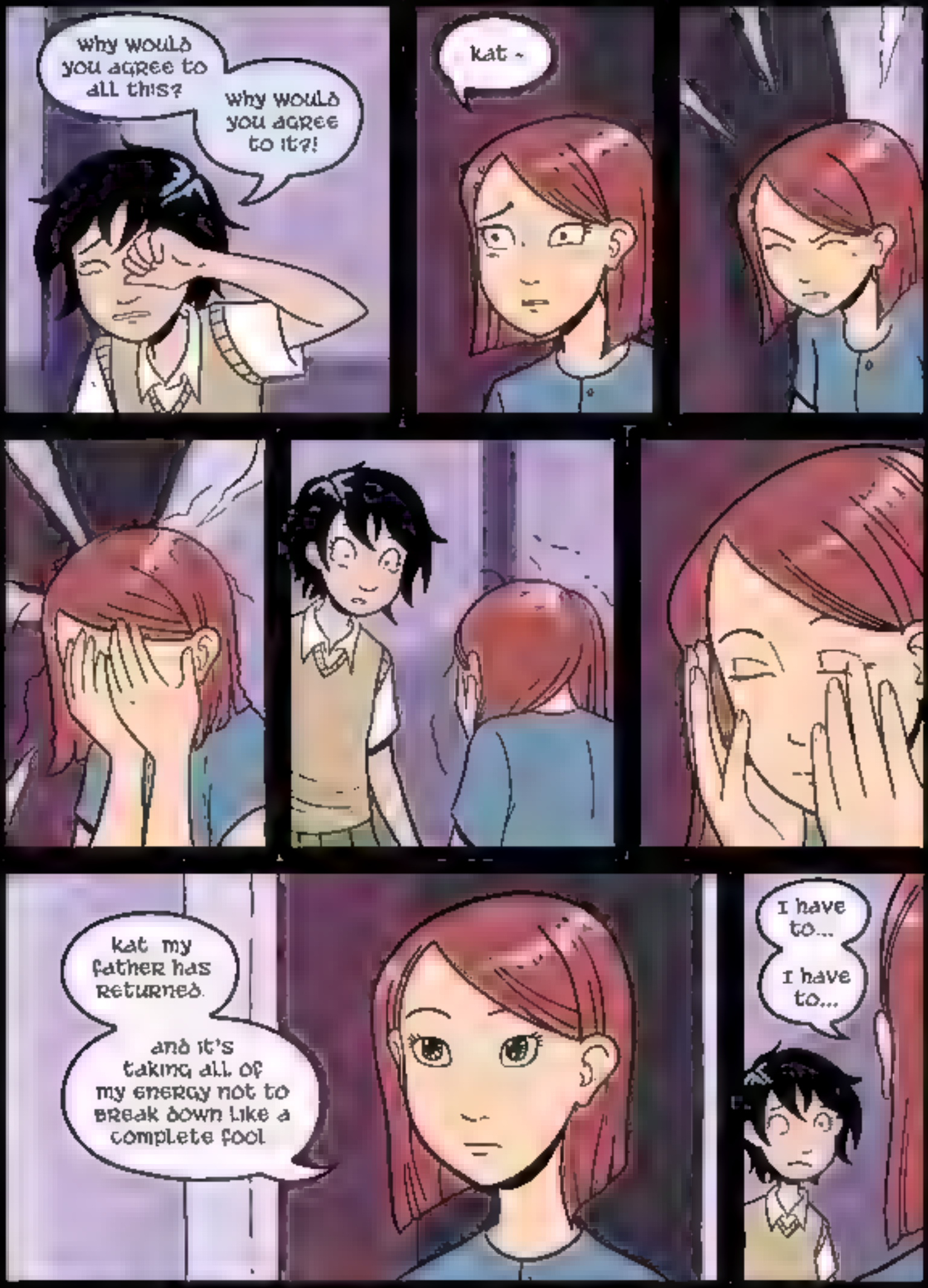

annie!
annie?!
no no
no no!


annie? are you here?
kat?
annie! what-


annie! why is your dad so mean to you?!
kat, he's not~
you're not supposed to have short hair!
you're supposed to have long hair!
I'm the one with short hair!
and your makeup!
that's your thing!
why would he try to humiliate you like that?!
kat, he didn't~
is it true? do you really have to repeat year nine?
yes.


I brought this upon myself, kat.
all this time... I've been...
your work...
I don't care!
I don't care about that!
but . why didn't you just tell me?
I had no idea you were having trouble with your school work!
...
I didn't want you to think I was stupid...
never, annie!
never!
I'd help you with anything!


Is that Renard?
Why isn't he saying anything?
I told him not to.
he made a big fuss when I told him I am to give him to my father.
what?!
you can't!
Renard! I know you can hear me! do something!
It's no use, Kat, I forbade him to-
how could you?!
he's our friend!


why would you agree to all this?
why would you agree to it?!
kat ~
kat my father has returned.
and it's taking all of my energy not to break down like a complete fool
I have to...
I have to...


okay. we'll deal with it.
one step at a time.
do you know where you're moving to?
I'll have a room near the year 9 dorms
all the way back there?!
oh, wait!
here, take this.
It's a simple two way radio.
It can text, too.

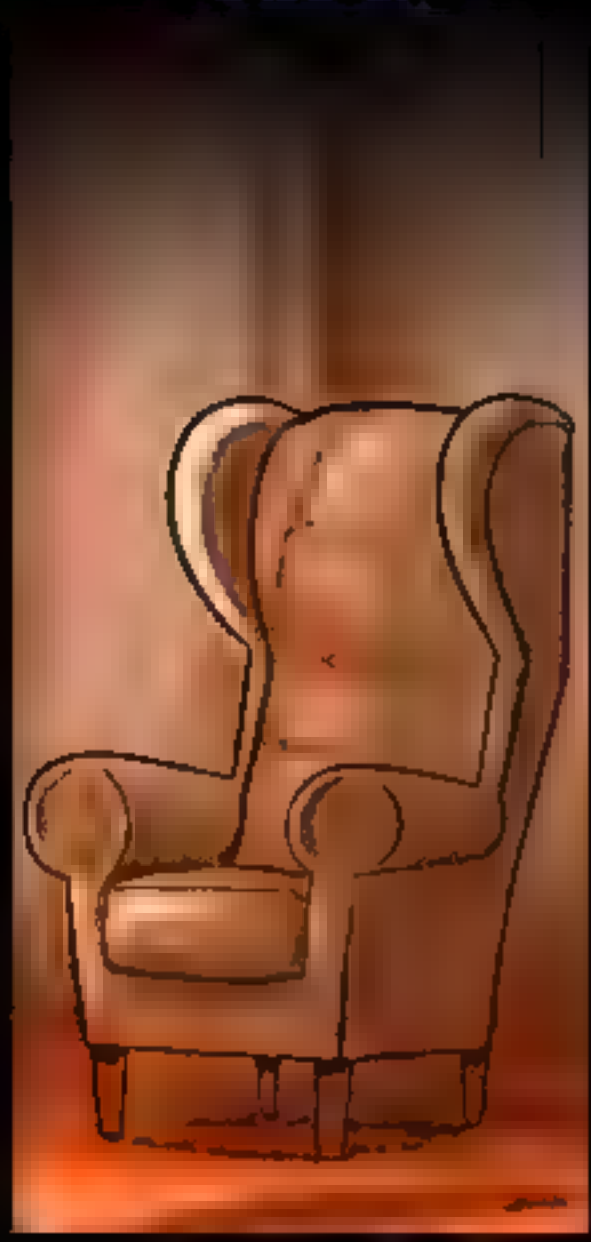

mine will always be on.
so if you ever need anything, any time...
thank you, kat...
don't let your dad know about it... just in case.
I can hide it.
let me come with you to your new place.
I'll help you take some of your stuff.
and I can send some robots to get the rest.



Gunnerkrigg Court

Chapter 52:

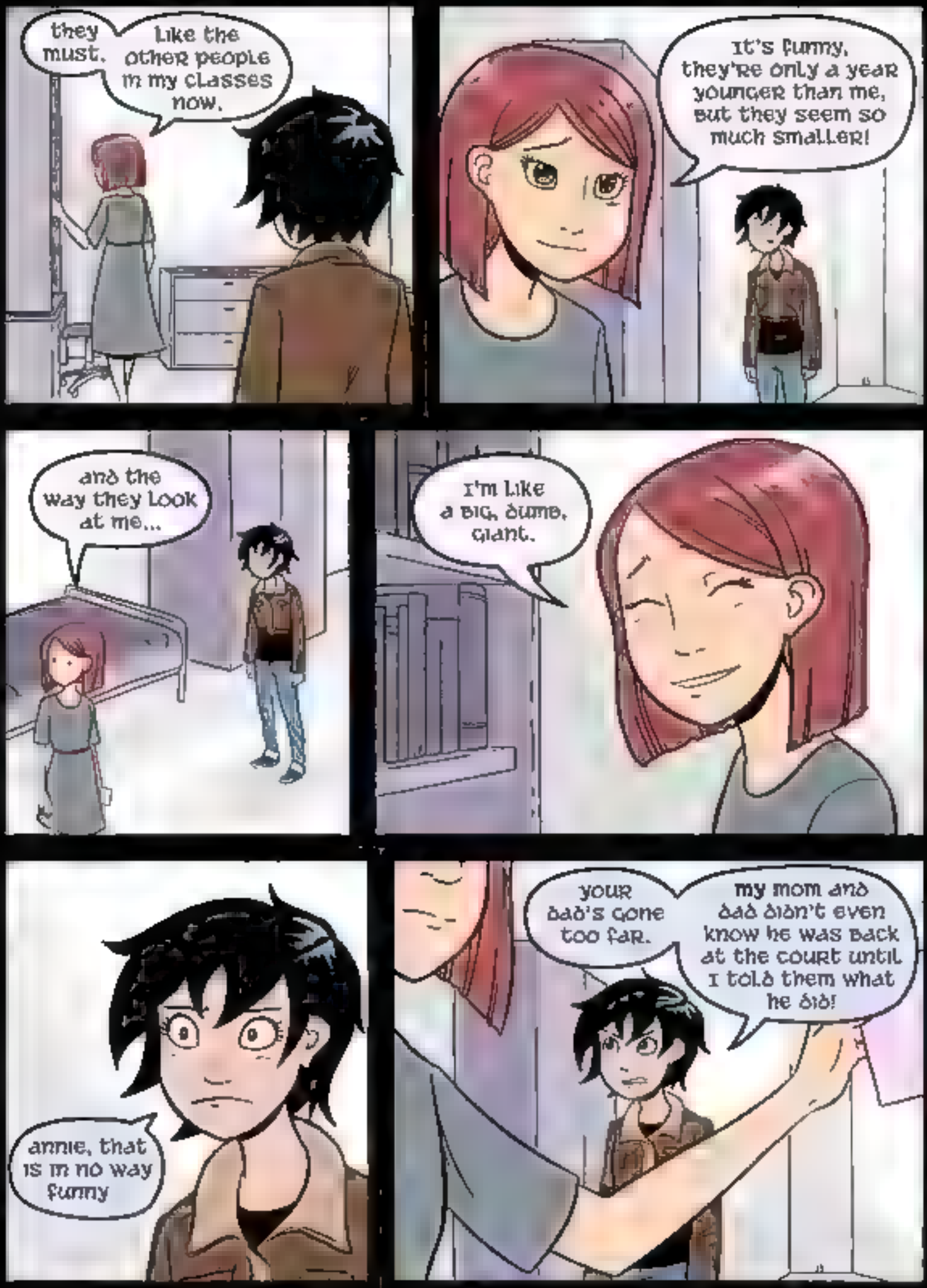
Sneak




CLANG
CLANG


kat!
TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP
Why is this stupid room so big?!
SORRY
Oh come here, you!
HUG
HUG


Look, I got a card for you!
all the boys signed it.
apparently it was wmsbury's idea, if you can believe it.
SORRY ABOUT YOUR HAIR
AND YOUR DAD
you know, I think he has a thing for you.
Kat, they're making fun of me.
they think I'm an idiot
what?! no they don't!
nobody does!


they must.
like the other people in my classes now.
it's funny, they're only a year younger than me, but they seem so much smaller!
and the way they look at me...
I'm like a big, dumb, giant.
annie, that is in no way funny
your dad's gone too far.
my mom and dad didn't even know he was back at the court until I told them what he did!


I think something fishy's going on.
Kat, I don't think there is anything fishy ..
But he just shows up out of the blue like this?
When's he supposed to get here?
Oh!


antimony, ms. sonlan.
I finished all my homework!
and the extra work you set!
oh! kat didn't help me! she just got here!
good. there will be more tomorrow
of course, of course!
now, about renard.
umm... yes?


he is not cooperating with my instructions.
o-oh?
are you sure you passed full control to [redacted]
yes! I'm sure! I gave him to you!
he's yours now!
I - I don't know why he isn't listening...
hm.
sir.
my parents wanted to invite you and annie to dinner tonight.
at like, seven.
we accept


antimony, make sure you are ready before then.
I will!
Nod
Clang
okay, parley and smit should be here any sec.
oh, kat, you're not still going to do that, are you?!
Bip!
man . what's with this room?
anne?!


annie, annie!
he made you cut your hair?!
no! he didn't!
how are you holding up?
I'm fine! I really am!
I'm just getting used to things
coyote is not happy about all this..
...
some are saying ysengrin thinks you're being held against your will.
If you see him, or coyote, please ask them to be patient...
you guys are right on time we should have a good few minutes.
kat, will you please not break in to my father's house?


We're just doing this to find Renard.
If he happens to be at your dad's place then it can't be helped.
But
Okay, can you get us there?
No problem.
Let's do this.
We'll be right back.
Bip
Bip


here!
Rey, are you okay?
Kat! how is she? how is antimony?
she's a mess
It's like she's barely holding it together.

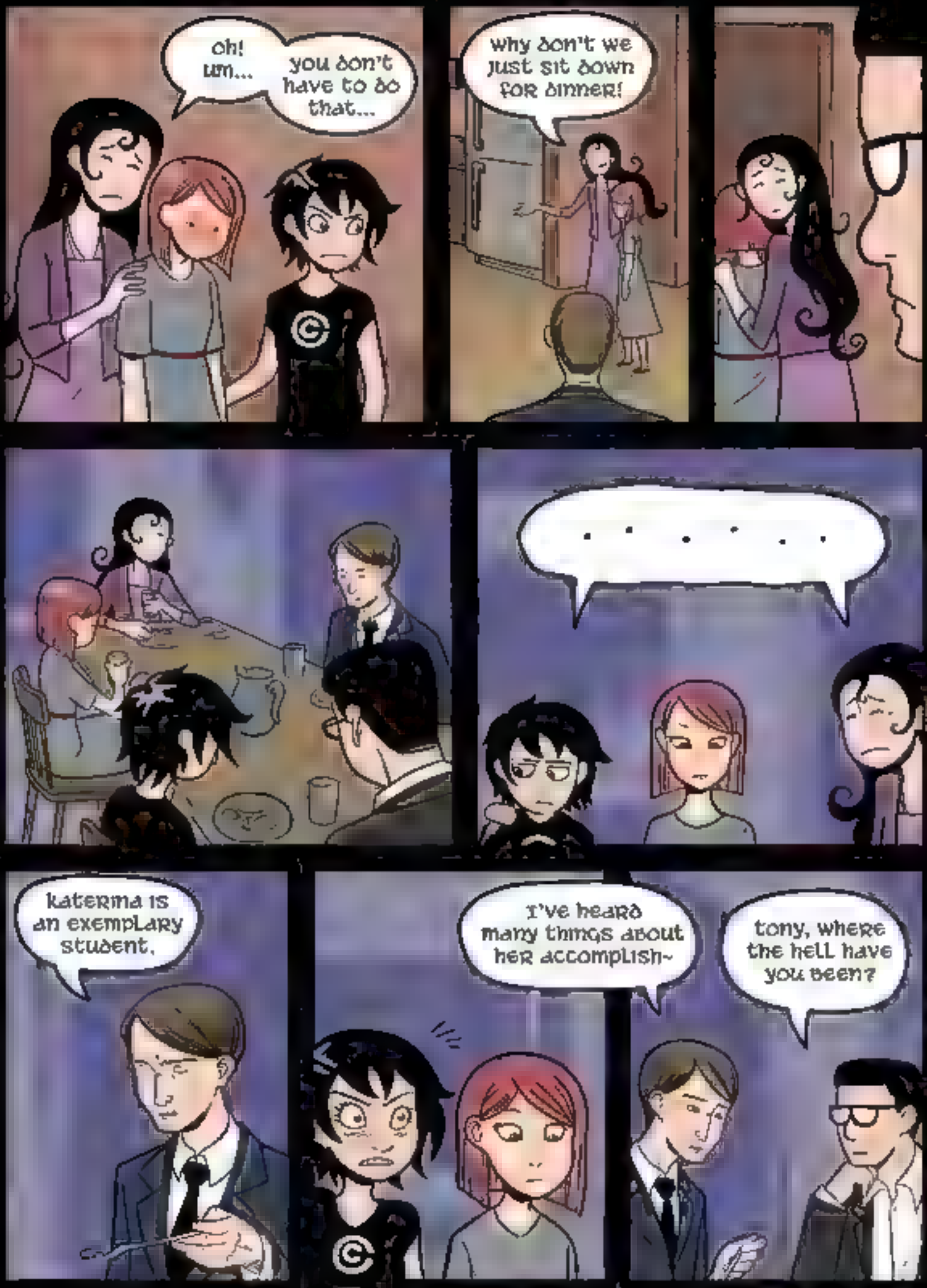

What's Mr. Carver done to you?
has he put you through any cruel experiments?!
well, no.
the fool still has no idea that antimony passed my ownership on to you.
he's not been able to command anything of me
I've looked around but the entire house is empty
these papers are all just antimony's school work.
he spends his evenings in silence.
he is a strange man indeed.
there's gotta be a reason why he came back.
he must be up to something.

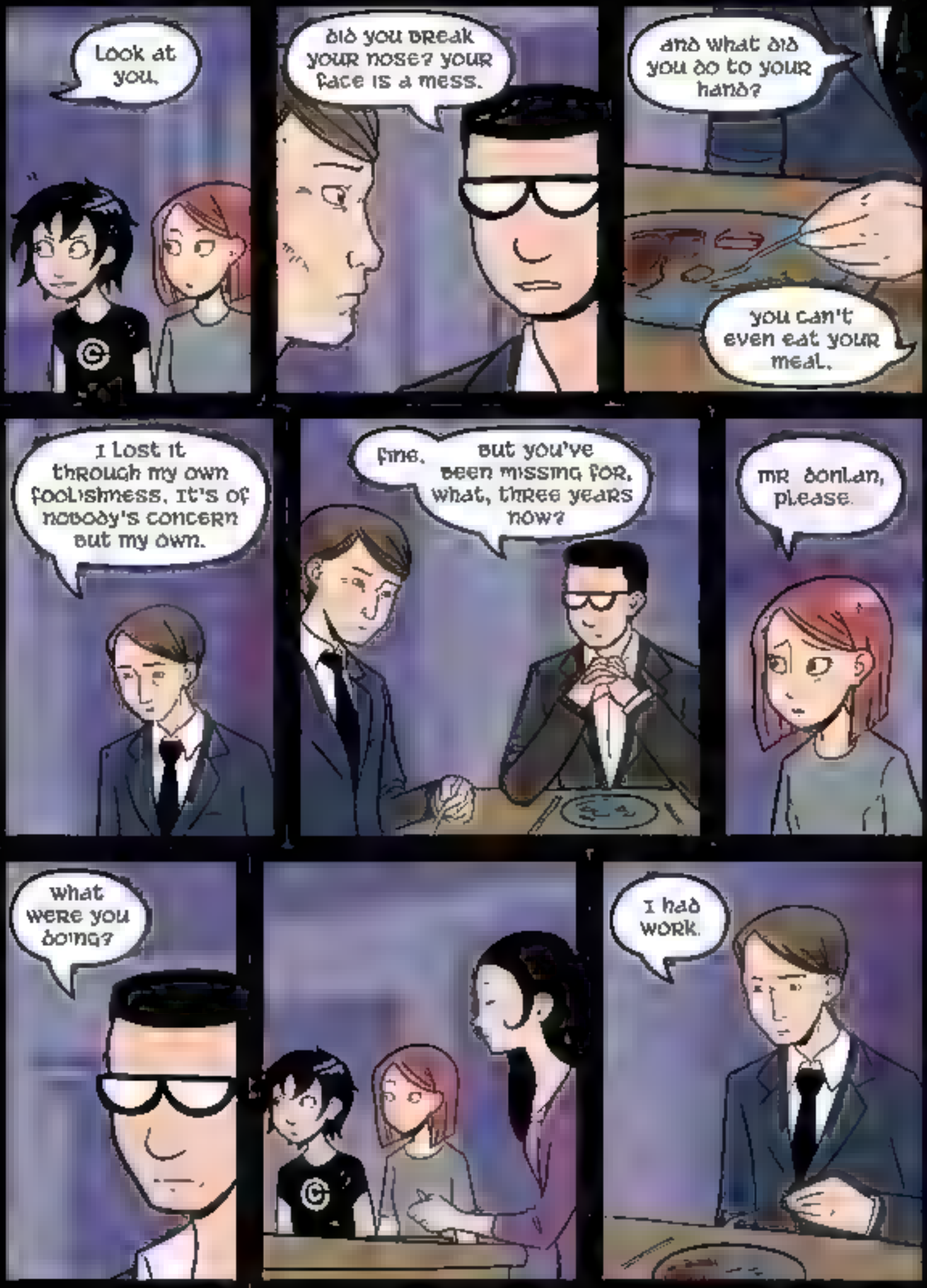

kat, I'm glad antimony put me in your possession.
I trust you.
I just wish I could help in some way.
I think it's best to just sit tight for now, man
we'll figure out a way to get you back.
but look... I promised annie I wouldn't let you... hurt mr. carver.
but if he tries to hurt you... then you have my permission to do whatever it takes to defend yourself...
...
I understand.
kat time to go.


see you soon.
Bip
Renard. I command you to show yourself.


KNOCK
KNOCK
tony.
donald.


anthony! It's ~
ah!
oh ~
um...
It's been so long!
it's good to see you again, anja.
both of you.
you must be so happy to be back together with annie again!
I was disappointed to find her cheating from your daughter.
I apologise for her behaviour.


oh! um...
you don't have to do that...
why don't we just sit down for dinner!
. . . . . .
katerma is an exemplary student.
I've heard many things about her accomplish~
tony, where the hell have you been?


Look at you.
Did you break your nose? Your face is a mess.
And what did you do to your hand?
You can't even eat your meal.
I lost it through my own foolishness. It's of nobody's concern but my own.
Fine. But you've been missing for, what, three years now?
Mr Donlan, please.
What were you doing?
I had work.


that's it? that's all you're going to say?
donald, you know there are aspects of our work that we cannot discuss openly
ahem... then, about renard.
over the past few years he and anne have become good friends.
did you need to take him away?
are you so trusting of him around your own daughter?
rey's a good guy! he'd never hurt me OR anne!
it's true, anthony, they've become quite the team!
I cannot be so quick to assume he's harmless
so quick?! you weren't even here!


kat!
yes, I am aware of my absence
you don't have to be so guarded about this, tony.
I think we've taken up enough of your time.
don't be ridiculous, you've been here less than an hour.
we must leave, antimony it's a school night
hey! don't use her like that!


dad! can't you do something about him?!
not like this I can't
ah, the poor girl...
a head-on approach never really works with tony
I can tell something happened to him but...
he's just not ready to talk yet.
I have to get through to him and make him realise that he's taken things too far.
there are some things even he can't control.


goodnight, antmony.
goodnight!


you can come down now!


that went quite well, I think!

Gunnerkrigg Court

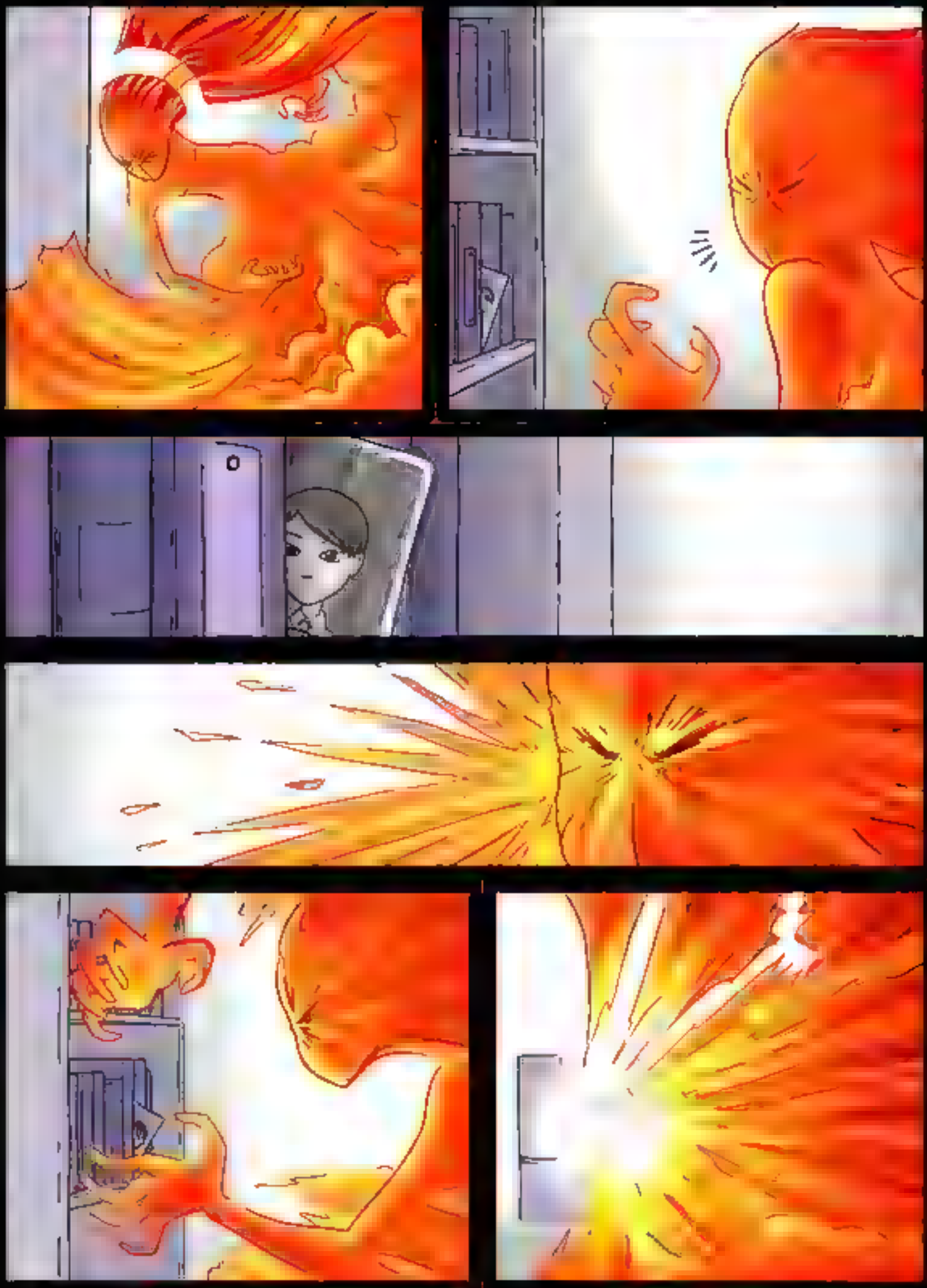
Chapter 53:

Annie and the Fire










you hate him?
yes, at times I do hate coyote
but my love for him is far deeper than my hate


anger can be a strength, but it can also consume you if you do not keep it under control.
how do you manage it?
poorly, at times
haha!
I try to keep it separate.
I see it as a creature with which I must fight
a personal demon.


I cannot say
how disappointed
I am
arrangements
for you to
Repeat year 9


Blink
I can't deal with you right now.



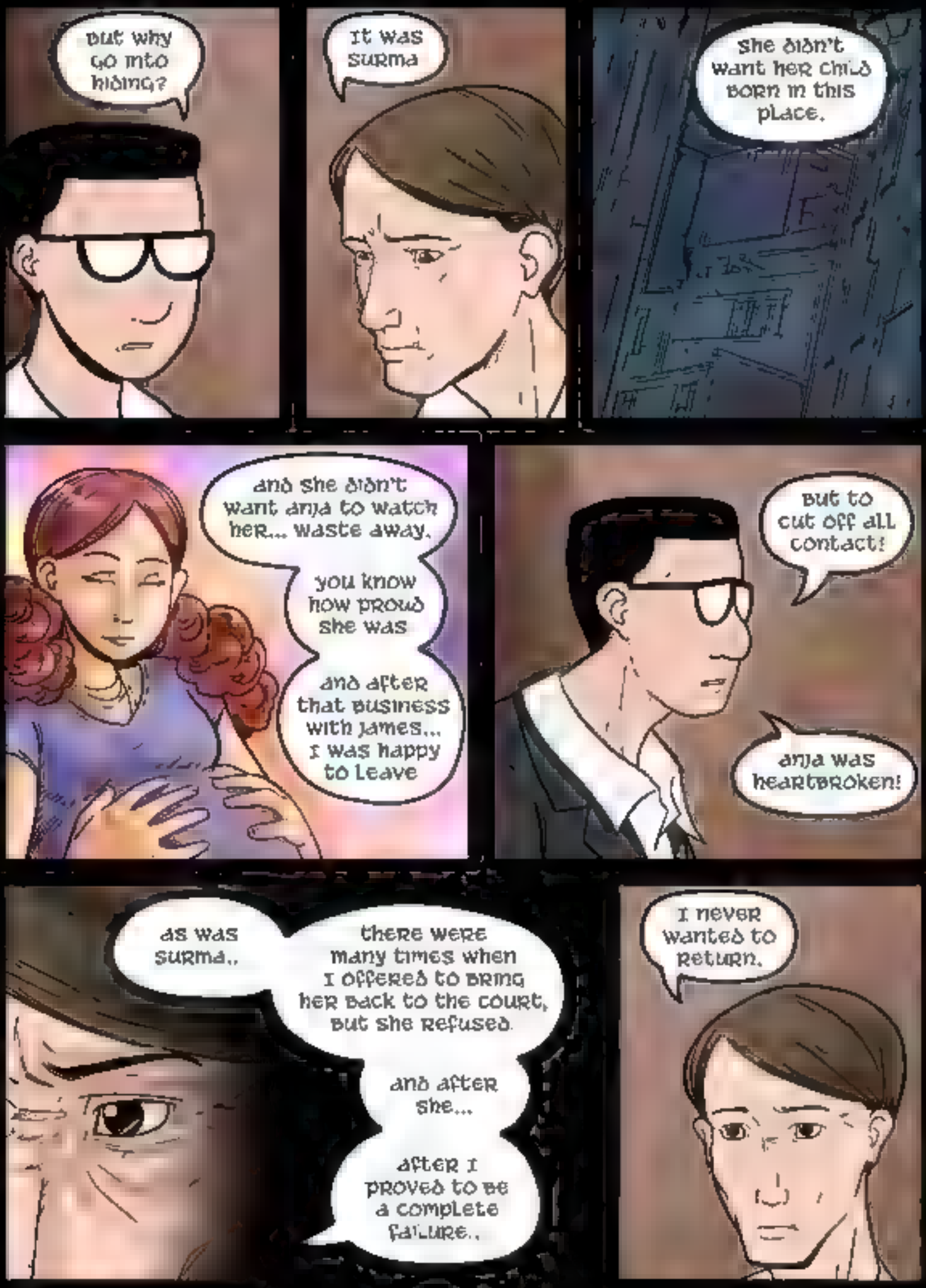

CLANG CLANG
Oh, Mr. Donlan?
Annie. I'm headed over to your dad's place.
Can I borrow your blinker stone?
Um... okay...
Blink
Give me ten minutes, then look through it.




get that in my house.
nice place, tony.
took me a week to feng shui the chair alone.


sit, sit.
jesus, tony.
quite the sight, yeah?
not much of a surgeon anymore.
is that why you came back?
hah, no.


they had me out there researching their blasted omega device.
?
oh! ahem
don't worry, I took care of all the surveillance in the building.
they can't hear us.
so the court knew where you were the whole time?
of course
they gave me access to all the equipment I needed to research the device and surma's pregnancy


but why go into hiding?
It was Surma
She didn't want her child born in this place.
and she didn't want anja to watch her... waste away.
you know how proud she was
and after that business with James... I was happy to leave
but to cut off all contact!
anja was heartbroken!
as was surma..
there were many times when I offered to bring her back to the court, but she refused.
and after she...
after I proved to be a complete failure..
I never wanted to return.


antimony...
how could she live with the man that killed her mother?
surma knew the risk she faced.
yes, but I promised I could help.
and after all those years I still couldn't find a medical explanation for what happened to her.
but look, you remember this business surma was involved in.
with these afterlife guides?
psychopomps?
surma mentioned it .
I went to find them.


the research I was involved in took me around the globe, so I was able to follow my own line of investigation.
I utterly failed to discover anything using my own methods and experience ..
so I sought new answers out there . beyond my boundaries
like a fool I thought I could escape the court's eye.
and for a time I thought I had..
perhaps they were just humoring me.
but I met with all sorts of people.
all sorts of creatures.


I saw things I'd never have believed had I not seen them with my own eyes.
and last year...
I thought I'd found what I was looking for.
I can't remember what part of the world I was in...
If I was even on this world at all...
It was like a waking dream.
they lived in places unreachable through physical travel.
but there were physical tolls to get there...


they told me...
haha, they told me I could see surma again!
they said the dead continue to exist in a world beyond our own!
they showed me how to construct an antenna
one that would reach out into this... ether
the phone call
but I needed some things
did my message come through on a telephone?
haha, I suppose that makes sense
antimony was the first person I thought of ..
I heard her voice echoing back through the caves
but I couldn't reply
Father, are you there?
Where are you?


I'm sorry, don. I know she must have come to you to use microsat 5.
I never wanted to involve her in this
tony.
what did you need those medical supplies for?
haha...
an antenna of blood and bone
made to reach through the layers of reality
my final surgery


and it worked.
the device distorted somehow...
not in size or shape..
but in being.
It extended, reached out,
pulled her back...
and I saw Surma again.


at least .. I thought I did...
tony...
annie was taken ill not long after we sent you those supplies...
don't tell me...
yes!
it was a trick!
haha!
they said it would bring forth surma's spirit
but they didn't say it would be at antimony's expense!


I had no idea what I'd done until the vision changed.
as if it was being intercepted somehow.
message from your little girl, mate!
thank God that thing interfered.
gave me this.


haha! my daughter!
my own daughter!
I almost.
I never wanted to come back...
I didn't deserve to see her again.
her father died out there, in those caves.
I wish my body had rotted away when the creatures left it in the wilderness..
but..


months..
I think it was months...
Later they were there.
the court.
they wanted me to come back.
Like they were reining me back in after I'd had my fun.
at first I declined but... they were going to expel her
been collecting information on antimony's activities.
this business with the forest pissed them off.
they were going to wait until her graduation and then cast her out.
banish her from the court and the program entirely


But they wanted me back.
M. CARVER
that was the bargain I made.
I'd work here again, and antimony would retake her last year to make up..
and when I came back... when I saw her again ..
she looked so much like her.
I almost lost my mind right there
how could I .
how could I do that to my own daughter...
CREAK


antimony, what you just saw doesn't excuse anything he did...
I just wanted you to see this side of him.
I'm not sure how else you would.

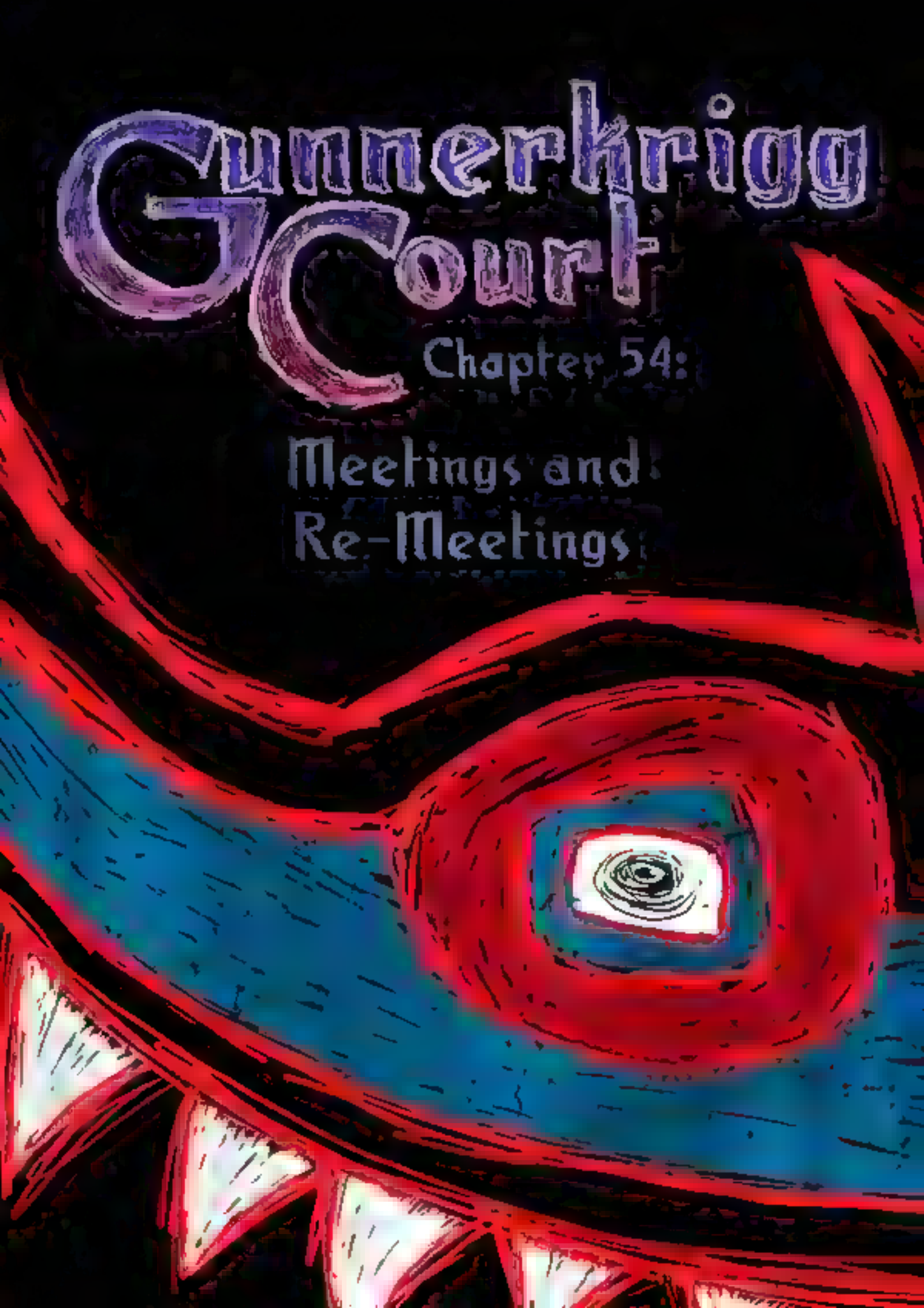

Blink
you see? he had his reasons
FWOOSH



Gunnerkrigg Court

Chapter 54:

Meetings and Re-Meetings



ONCE UPON A TIME COYOTE MADE FRIENDS WITH A GIRL WHO LIVED IN A COLD DARK PLACE CALLED THE COURT

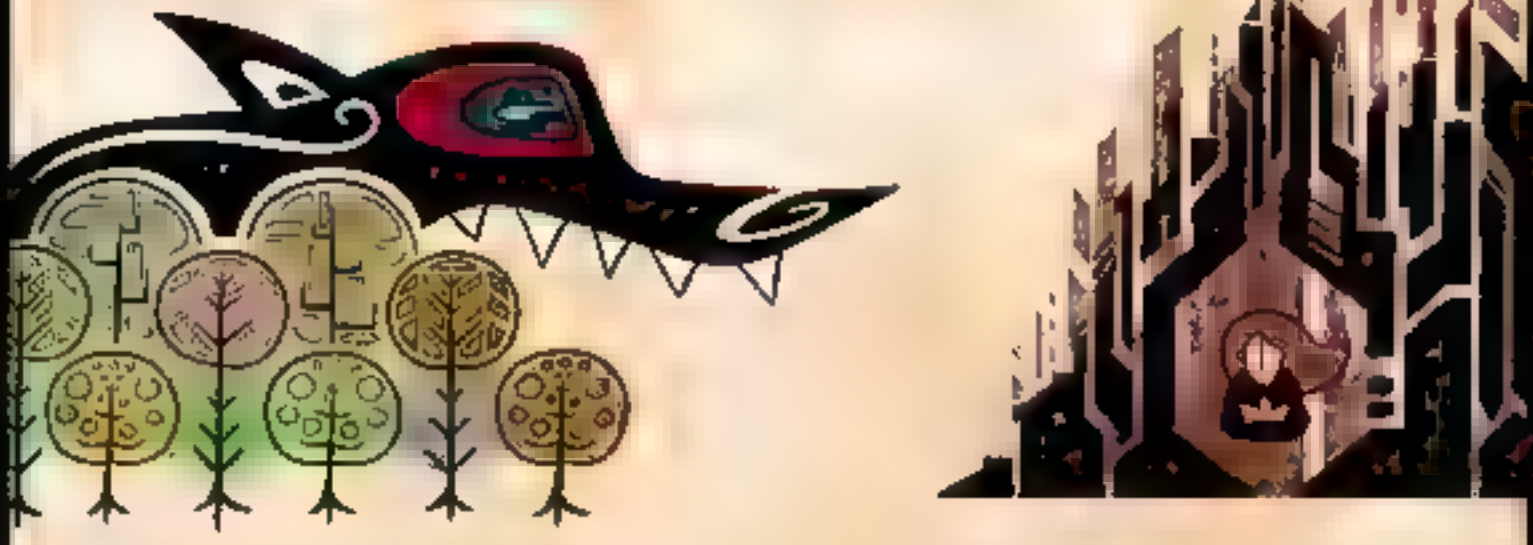


HE ENJOYED PLAYING WITH HER AND SHE MADE HIM LAUGH

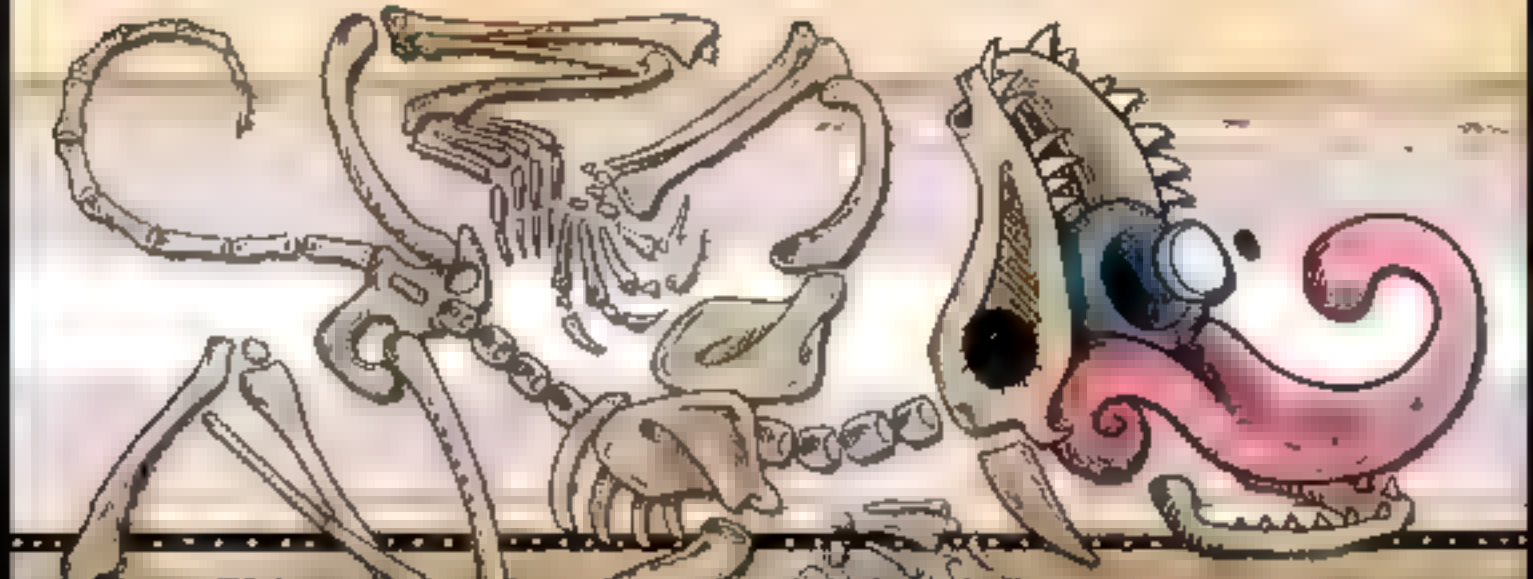
EVEN MEAN OLD YSENGRIN SEEMED TO BRIGHTEN UP WHEN SHE VISITED



BUT ONE DAY THE GIRL STOPPED VISITING COYOTE IN HIS FOREST



SHE WAS BEING KEPT IN THE COURT
AND COYOTE DIDN'T LIKE THIS AT ALL



SO HE PROPOSED A MEETING WITH THE LORDS OF THE COURT




AT THE MEETING HE DEMANDED TO SEE HIS FRIEND
BUT WHEN THEY BROUGHT HER TO HIM, COYOTE SAW SOMETHING WAS WRONG
This isn't FIRE HEAD GIRL!
HE SAID
She looks and smells the same but it's NOT her!

THE LORDS OF THE COURT BROUGHT A BROKEN MAN TO COYOTE



THE BROKEN MAN WAS THE REASON FIRE HEAD GIRL DIDN'T VISIT THE FOREST ANY MORE



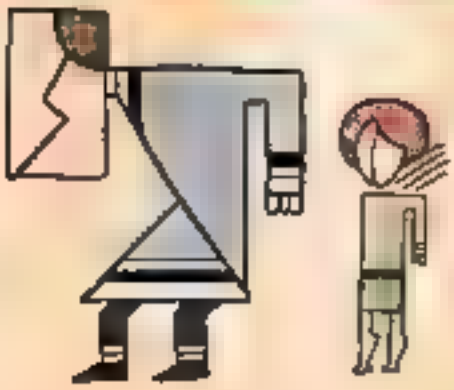
THIS MADE COYOTE VERY ANGRY



SO HE PUSHED OVER ONE OF THEIR LITTLE BUILDINGS

THE LORDS OF THE COURT WERE UPSET AND AFRAID





THEY ASKED THE BROKEN MAN TO LET FIRE HEAD GIRL GO BACK TO THE FOREST

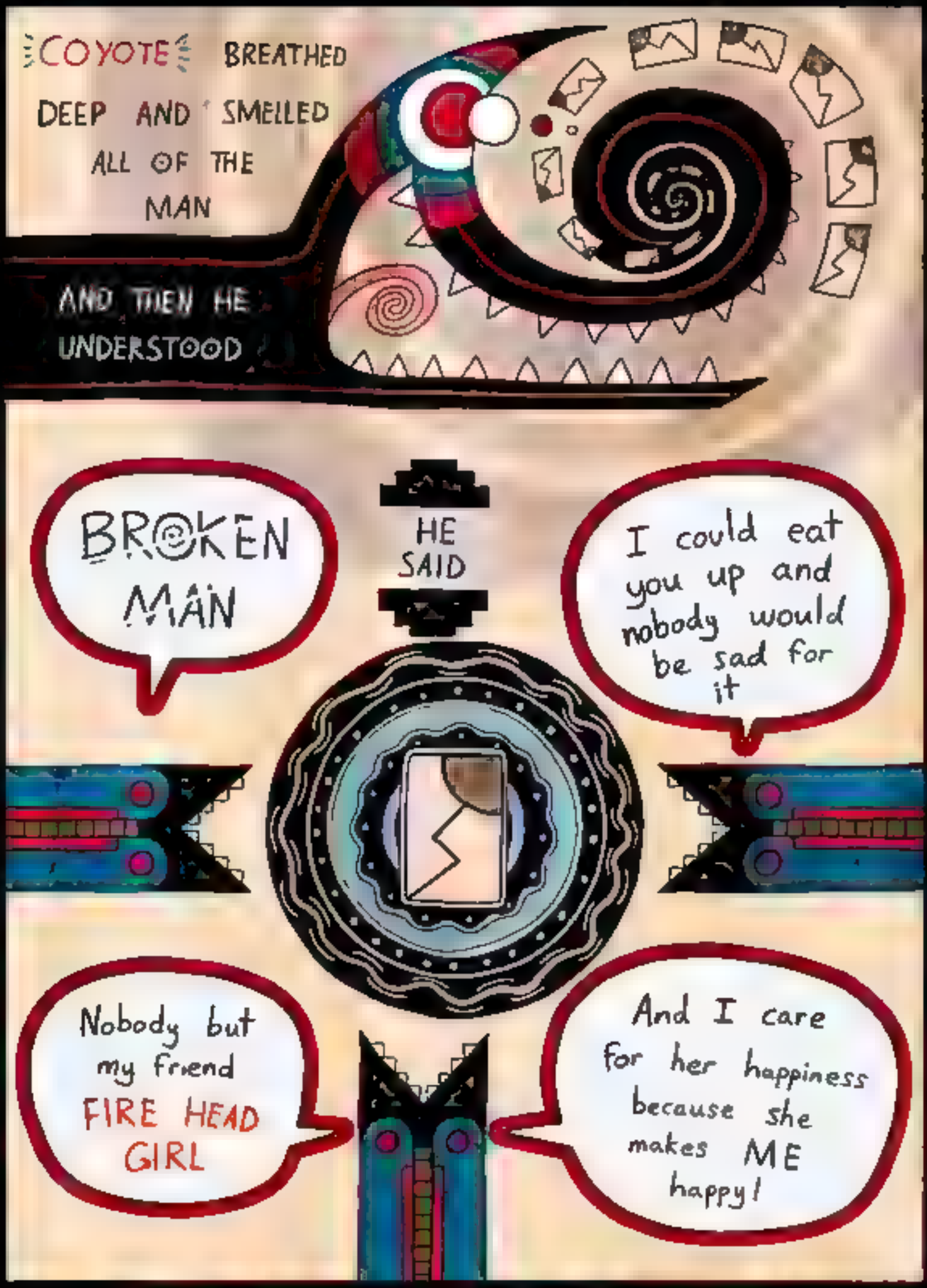
BUT THE BROKEN MAN LOOKED AT COYOTE AND SAID

HOW CAN SHE BE SAFE WHEN YOU GET SO ANGRY?

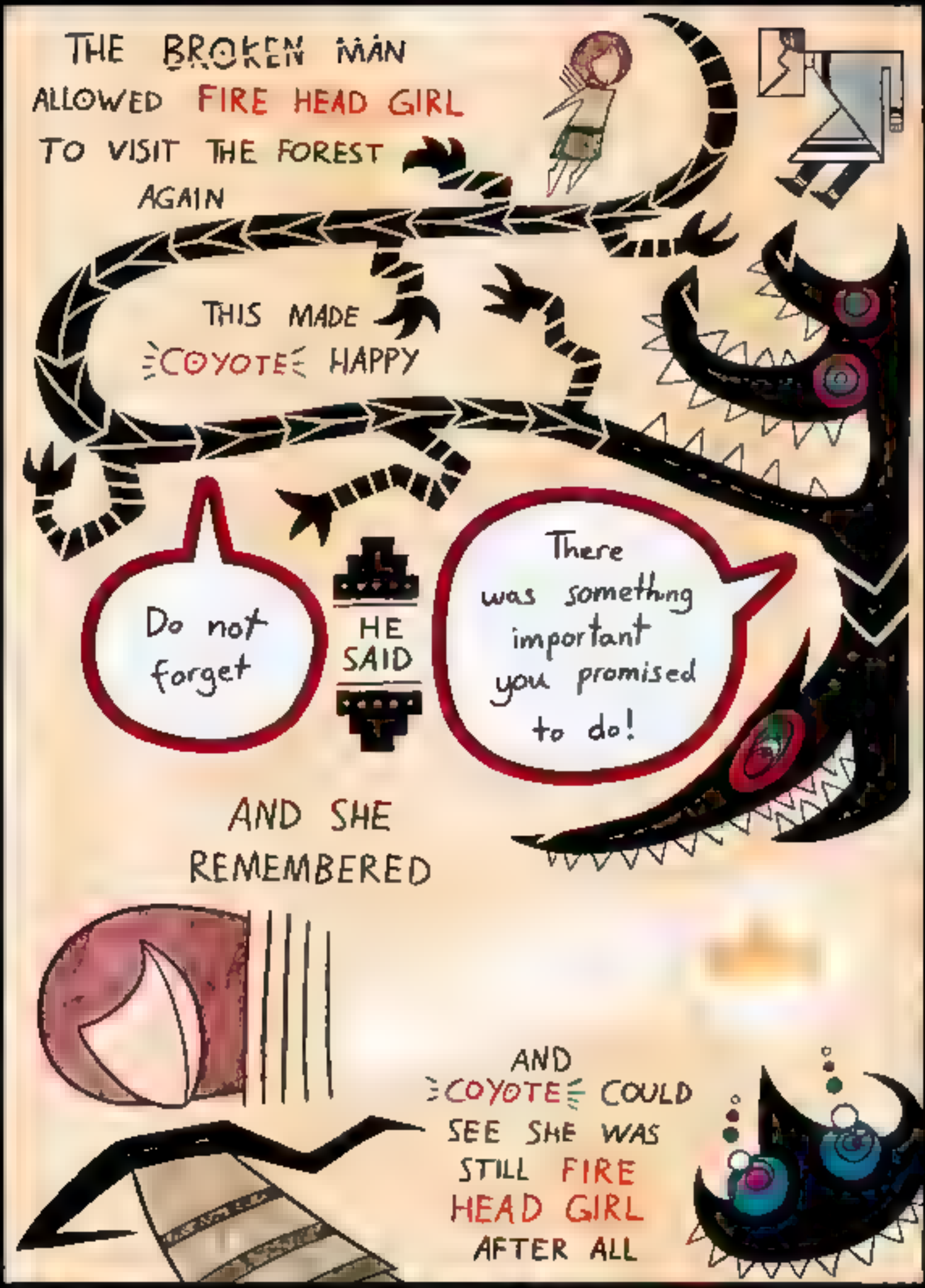


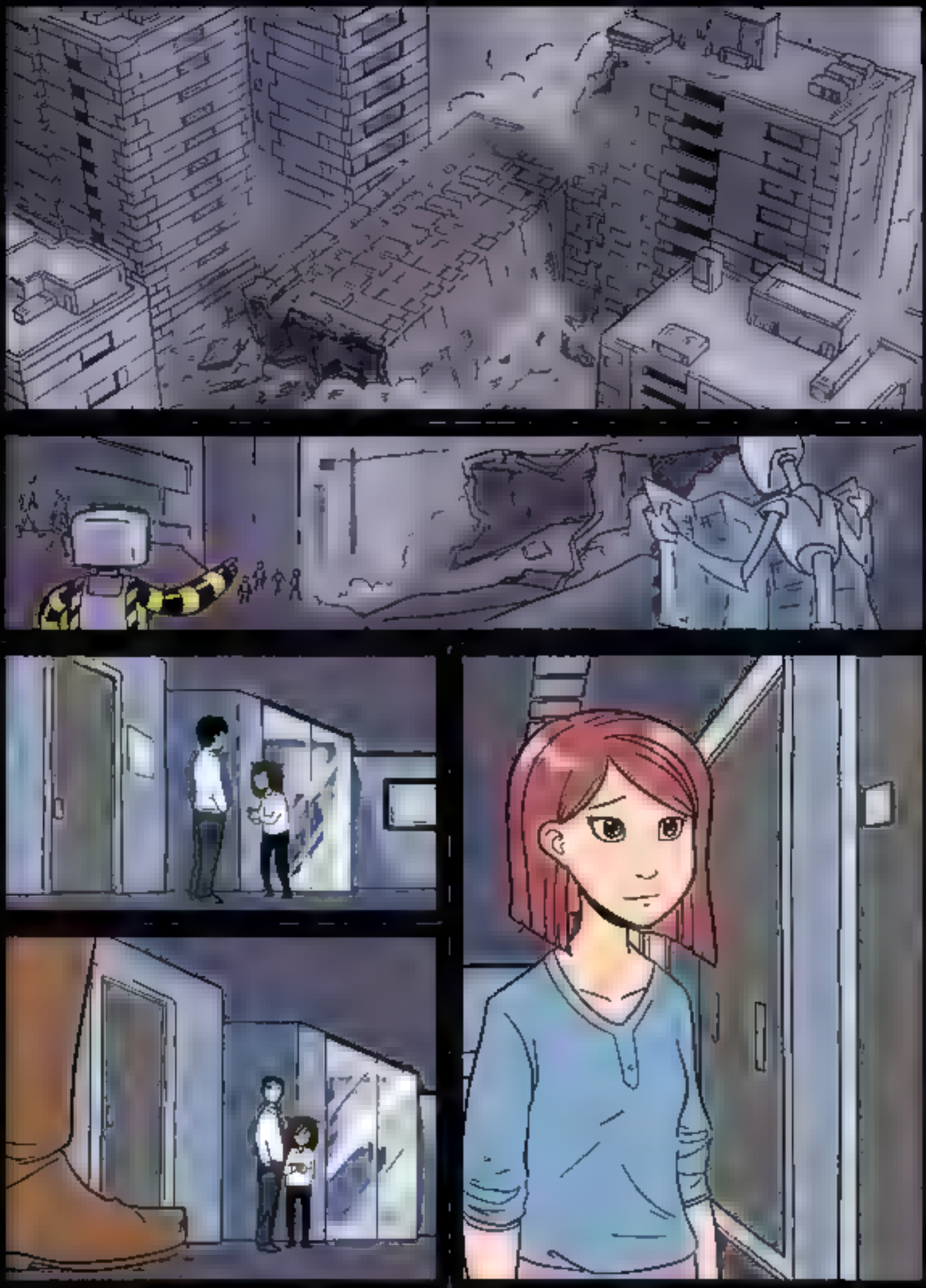


COYOTE LAUGHED AT THIS


COYOTE BREATHED DEEP AND SMELLED ALL OF THE MAN
AND THEN HE UNDERSTOOD
BROKEN MAN
HE SAID
I could eat you up and nobody would be sad for it
Nobody but my friend FIRE HEAD GIRL
And I care for her happiness because she makes ME happy!


In the forest She is loved and she is safe
But what is she here?
Look at what you have done to her!
THE BROKEN MAN LOOKED AT THE GIRL AND COYOTE COULD SEE A WAR WAGING INSIDE HIS MIND
COYOTE LAUGHED AT THIS


THE BROKEN MAN ALLOWED FIRE HEAD GIRL TO VISIT THE FOREST AGAIN
THIS MADE COYOTE HAPPY
Do not forget
HE SAID
There was something important you promised to do!
AND SHE REMEMBERED
AND COYOTE COULD SEE SHE WAS STILL FIRE HEAD GIRL AFTER ALL




Ready to go?
I am.
And you? Do you want to go and see your friend?
Nod
Are you taking that toy to show her?
Yeah. It's my fave.
Then let's go and see if we can find her.


What's wrong?


It pains me to see you like this.
I can see what you have done.
I took your advice, Ysengrin.
I'm keeping my anger separate
I didn't expect you to be so literal
It's helping me manage.
manage what?
my father has returned.
so?


so?
we've talked about him before.
yes he was gone.
but now he is back?
and the first thing he does is make me take my makeup off!
your face pants? I see
you smell better without them.
and ~ and then, after all these years, he tells me he's disappointed in me!
why?
he found out I was... cheating in my classes..
hmm
Is that not a reason to be disappointed?
you don't get it
I would be disappomted also.
you just don't get it.


did he force you to cut out this essential part of yourself?
no, but I was so angry!
you burned a moss ogre to the bone...
and this man reduces you to this state?
your fire and your anger are one and the same.
without them, you are weak
summon your blinker stone
Blink
you use this child's toy to hide yourself.
Pop

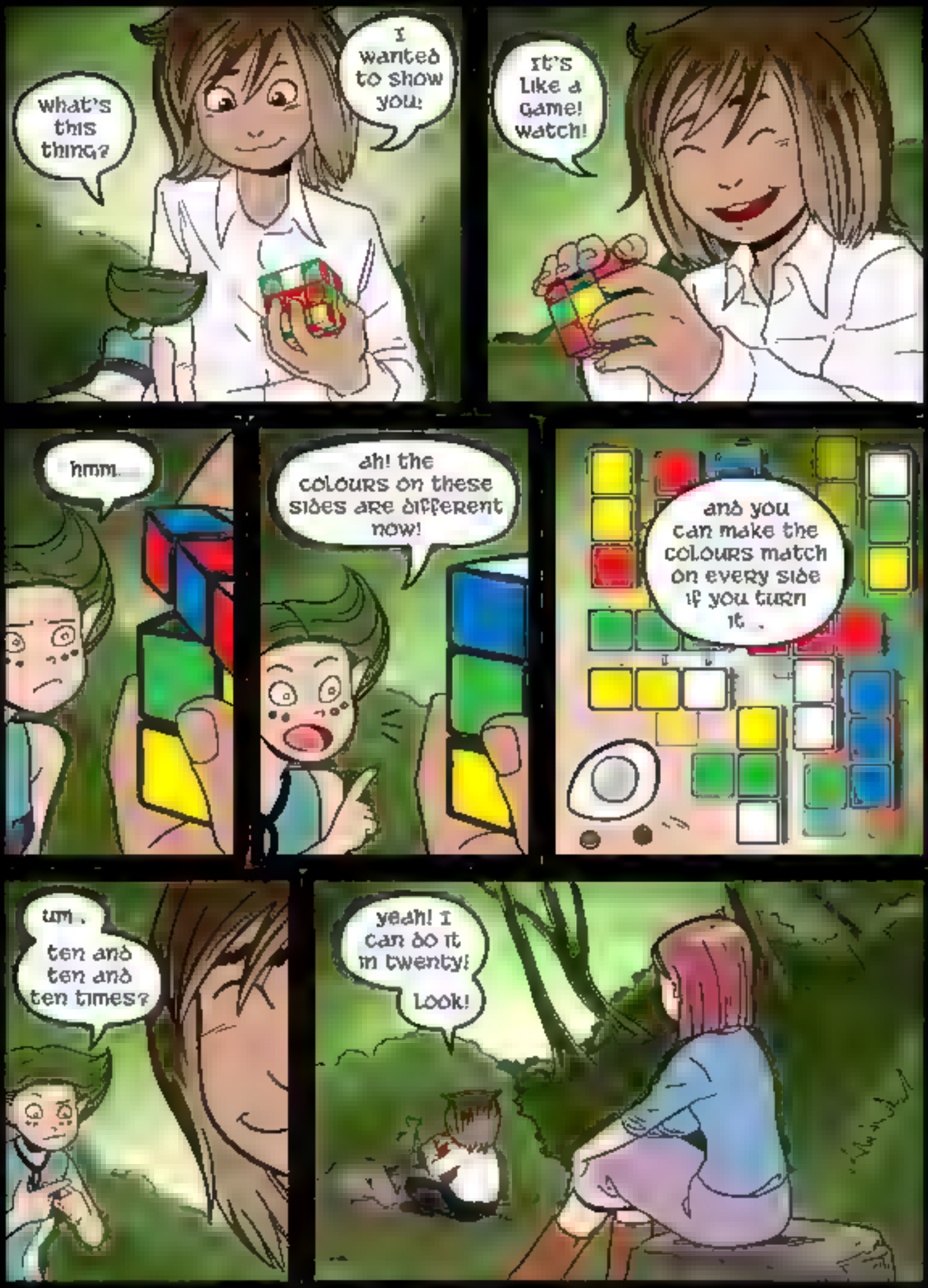

ahh!
what did you do?!
you!
y-you!
your father looks at you and sees the ghost of his dead wife.
direct your anger at me if you must.
now, at least, you cannot ignore it.
it is his loss if he does not see what an incredible creature his daughter is


If he truly does hurt you, I will rend the flesh from h's bones on your word.
but for now .
do the job you have promised.
oh! it's you!
Look andrew, it's the forest medium!
I didn't recognise you before!


careful! don't~
we're almost there!
c'mon!
I was telling andrew how everything looks weird now!
I think it's cos I'm bigger!
but, like, I think I know the way!
oh! look, look!




PLONk
Is that really you?
yeah .. it's me
then . so you know my name?
SNIFF IN* OUT OUT
*translation: snuffle
oh!
you're so fat now!
haha! I know!


what's this thing?
I wanted to show you!
it's like a game! watch!
hmm...
ah! the colours on these sides are different now!
and you can make the colours match on every side if you turn it...
um... ten and ten and ten times?
yeah! I can do it in twenty! look!

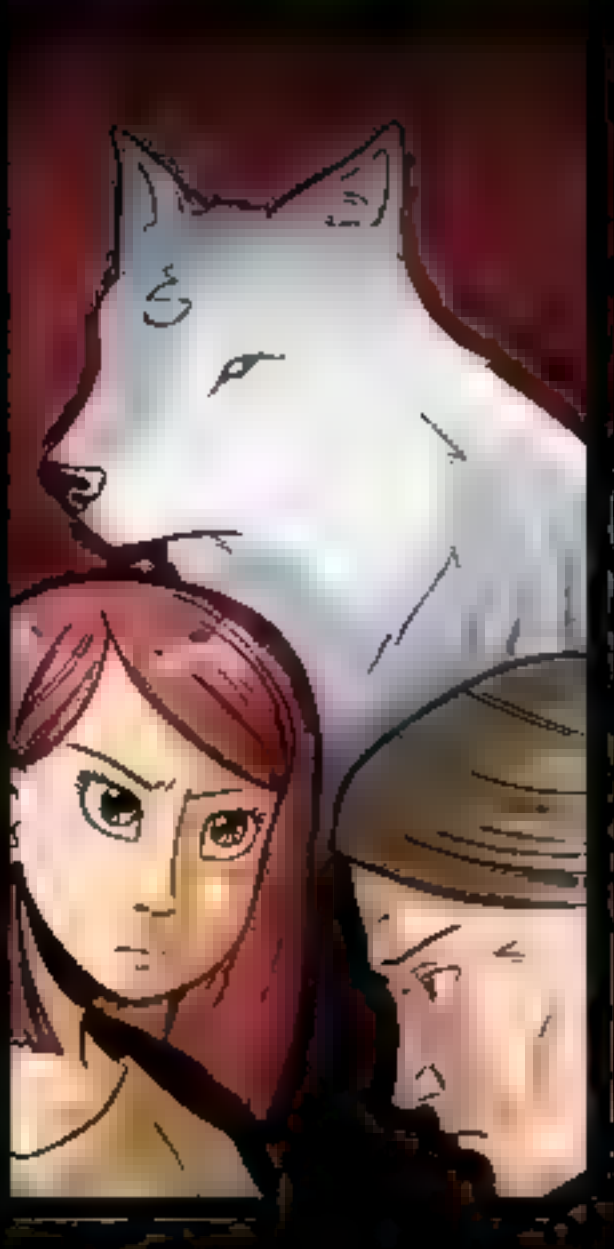

I won't apologise.
my blinker stone was a gift from a bear friend I'll never see again
but.. thank you.
I was being selfish again.
my situation might not be important to you, but it is to me.
and I let that get in the way of my job.
and... almost hurt the people around me...


my friends didn't abandon me.
but I did abandon a friend.
and I have to get him back.

Gunnerkrigg Court

Chapter 55:

The Break Out

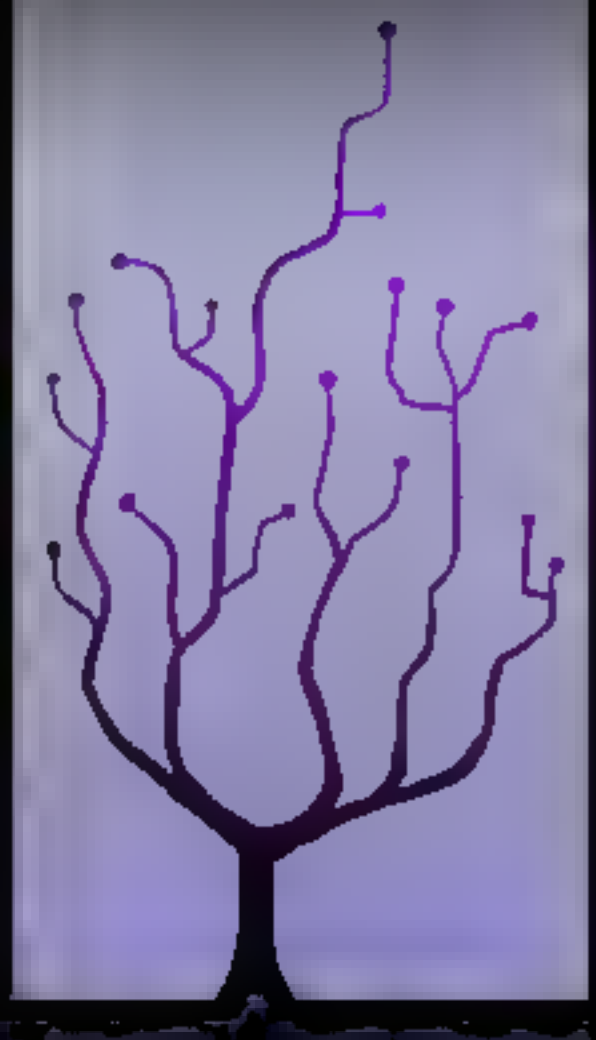


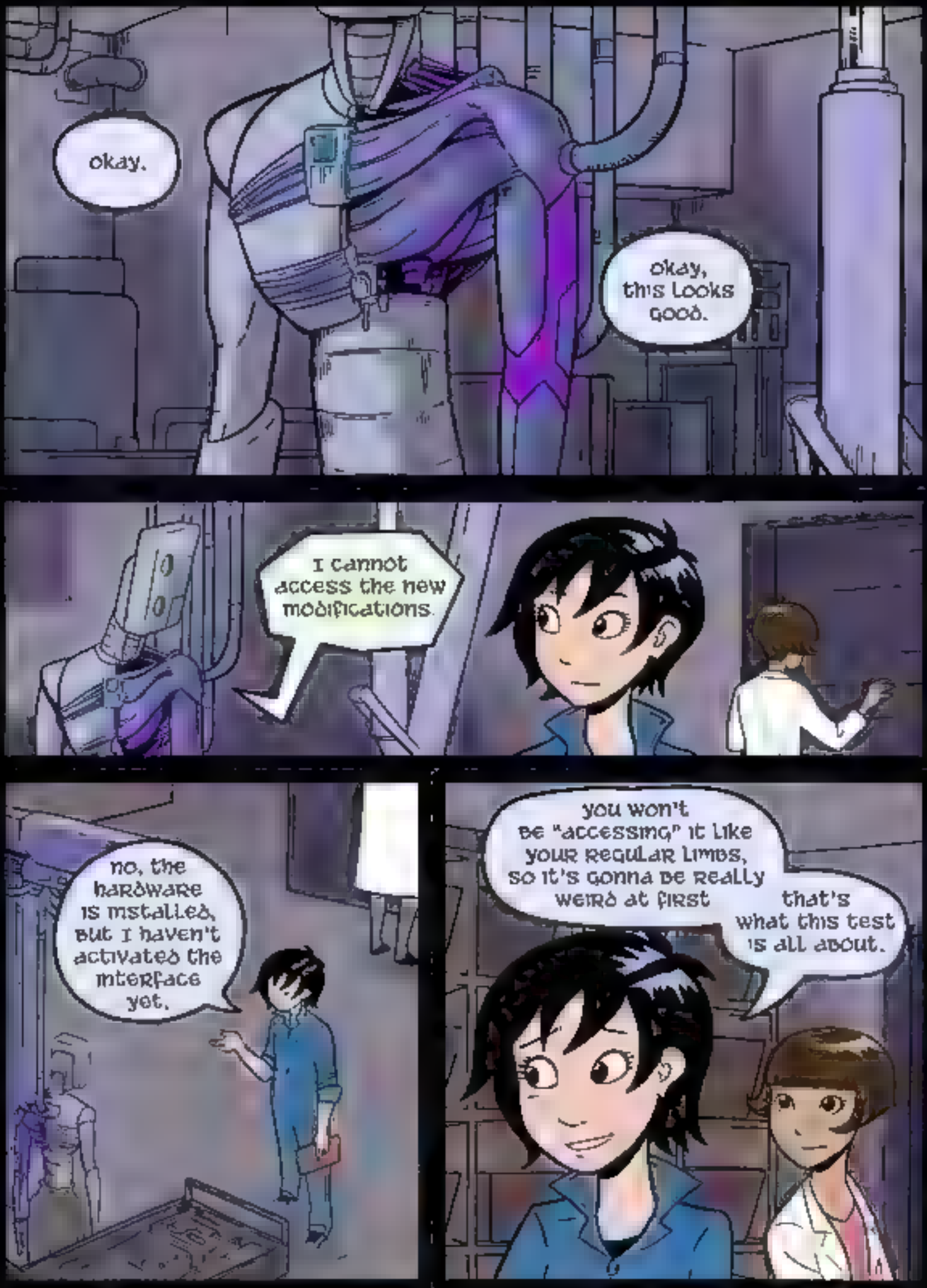

Ding Dong
I - I want Renard back.
he s my friend, and even if you don't think so, he
Is there anything else?
I - um... uh...
no.
very well. good night, antimony
good night...
click

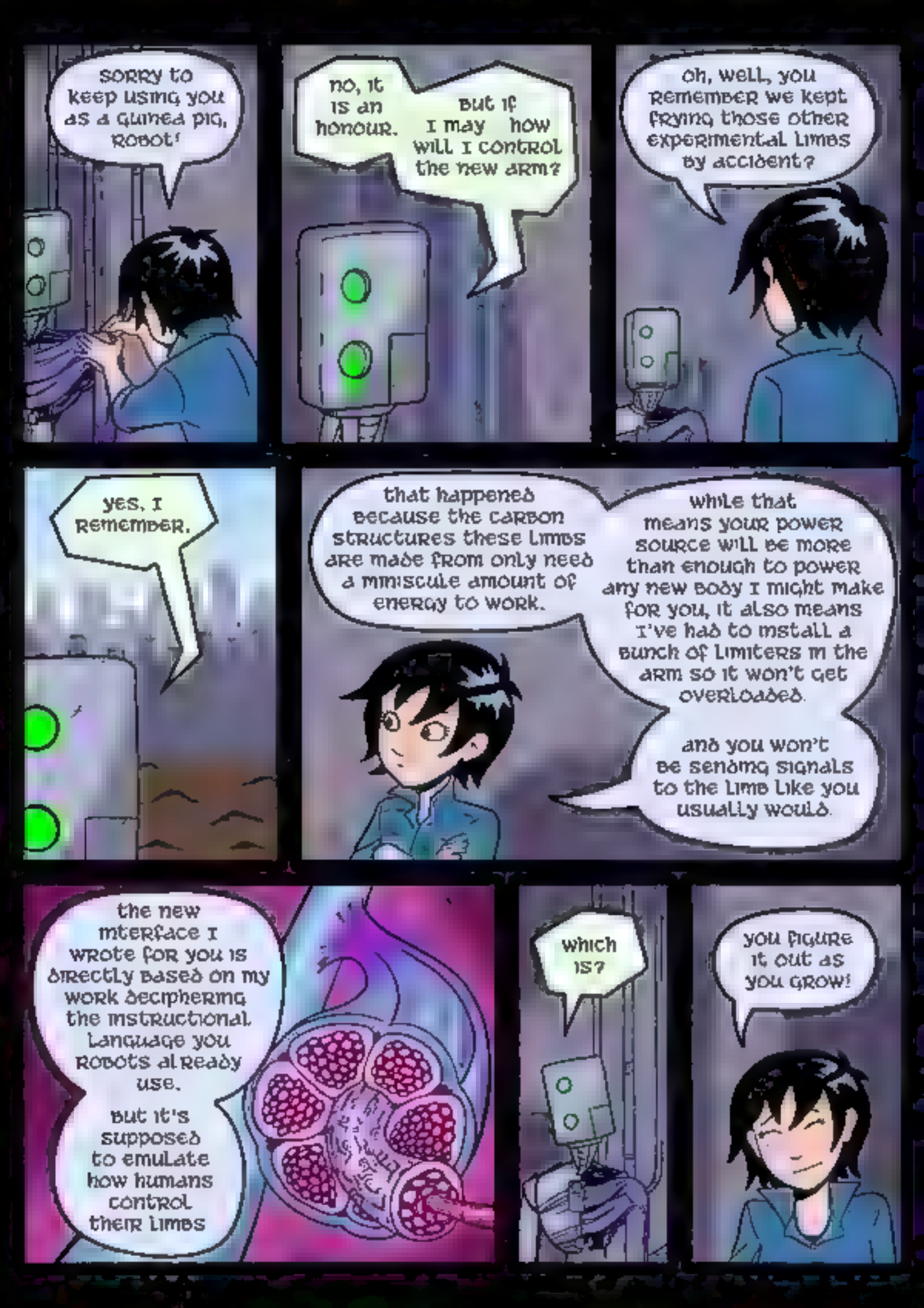
Gunnerkrigg Court

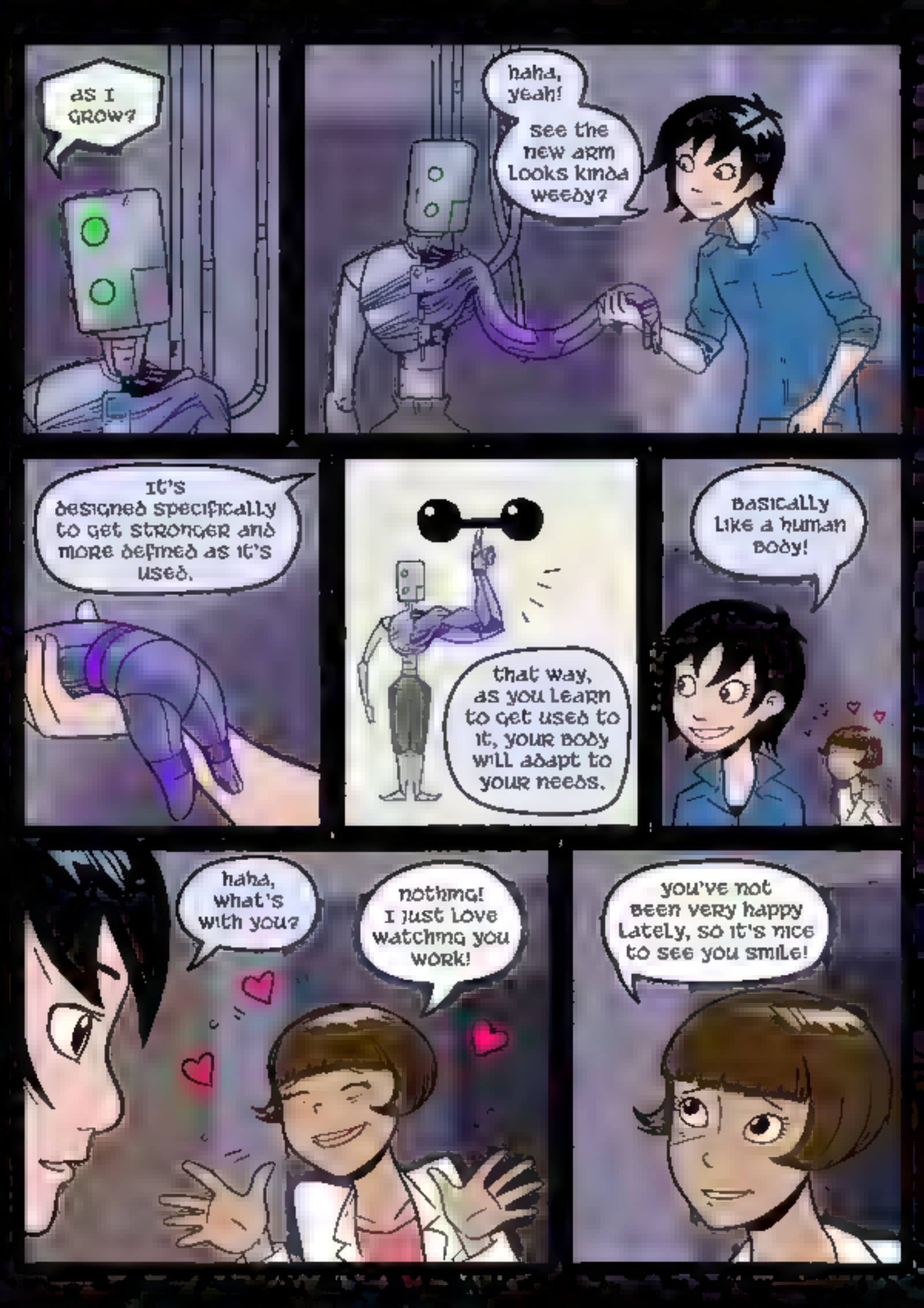
Chapter 56:

New Data




okay.
okay, this looks good.
I cannot access the new modifications.
no, the hardware is installed, but I haven't activated the interface yet.
you won't be "accessing" it like your regular limbs, so it's gonna be really weird at first
that's what this test is all about.


sorry to keep using you as a guinea pig, robot!
no, it is an honour.
but if I may how will I control the new arm?
oh, well, you remember we kept frying those other experimental limbs by accident?
yes, I remember.
that happened because the carbon structures these limbs are made from only need a miniscule amount of energy to work.
while that means your power source will be more than enough to power any new body I might make for you, it also means I've had to install a bunch of limiters in the arm so it won't get overloaded.
and you won't be sending signals to the limb like you usually would.
the new interface I wrote for you is directly based on my work deciphering the instructional language you robots already use.
but it's supposed to emulate how humans control their limbs
which is?
you figure it out as you grow!


as I grow?
haha, yeah!
see the new arm looks kinda weeby?
it's designed specifically to get stronger and more defined as it's used.
that way, as you learn to get used to it, your body will adapt to your needs.
basically like a human body!
haha, what's with you?
nothing! I just love watching you work!
you've not been very happy lately, so it's nice to see you smile!


yeah, I guess I've been pretty distracted these days.
It's been good to take my mind off things. .
how is annie lately?
the same, I suppose.
I've not even seen her for a few days.
I just wish there was something more I could do to help her...
I'm sorry, katinha.
not everything can be fixed like a ROBOT.
if only!


over the summer I made a ton of progress on my robotics work.
but then her dad showing up out of nowhere just shook everything up.
we had to put a lot of stuff on hold..
and with annie held back a year, it feels like she's slipping away...
that will not happen!
you know everyone in the class misses her!
even william, he talks about her often!
haha! that guy!
just give her some time and be there if she needs you.
BEEP BEEP
oh, it's ready.


okay, I'm sending you the new code.
received
activating.
oh.
oh.
rebooting.
...
you there?
I apologise for my outburst that was a strange experience.
can you describe it?
I will try.



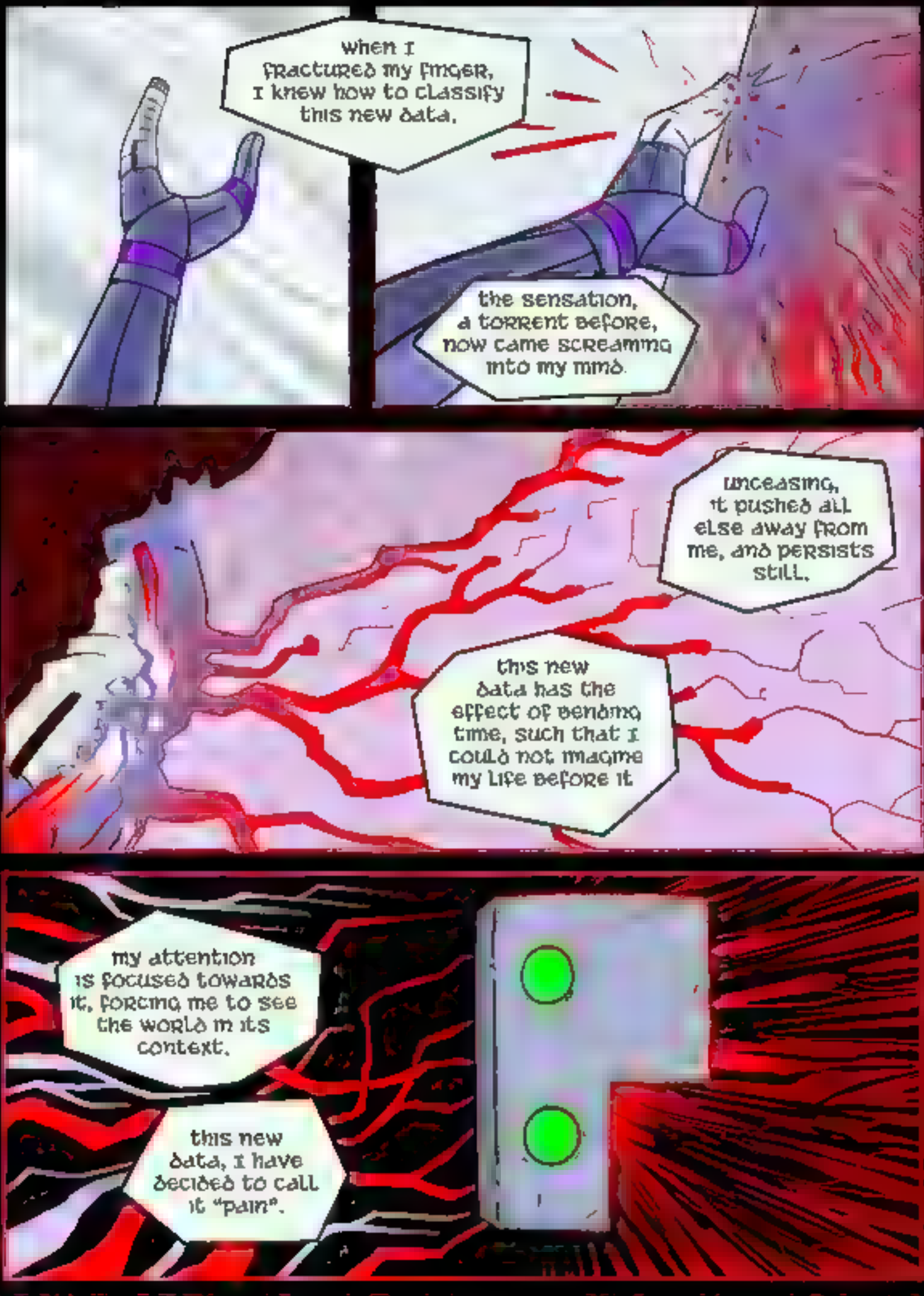


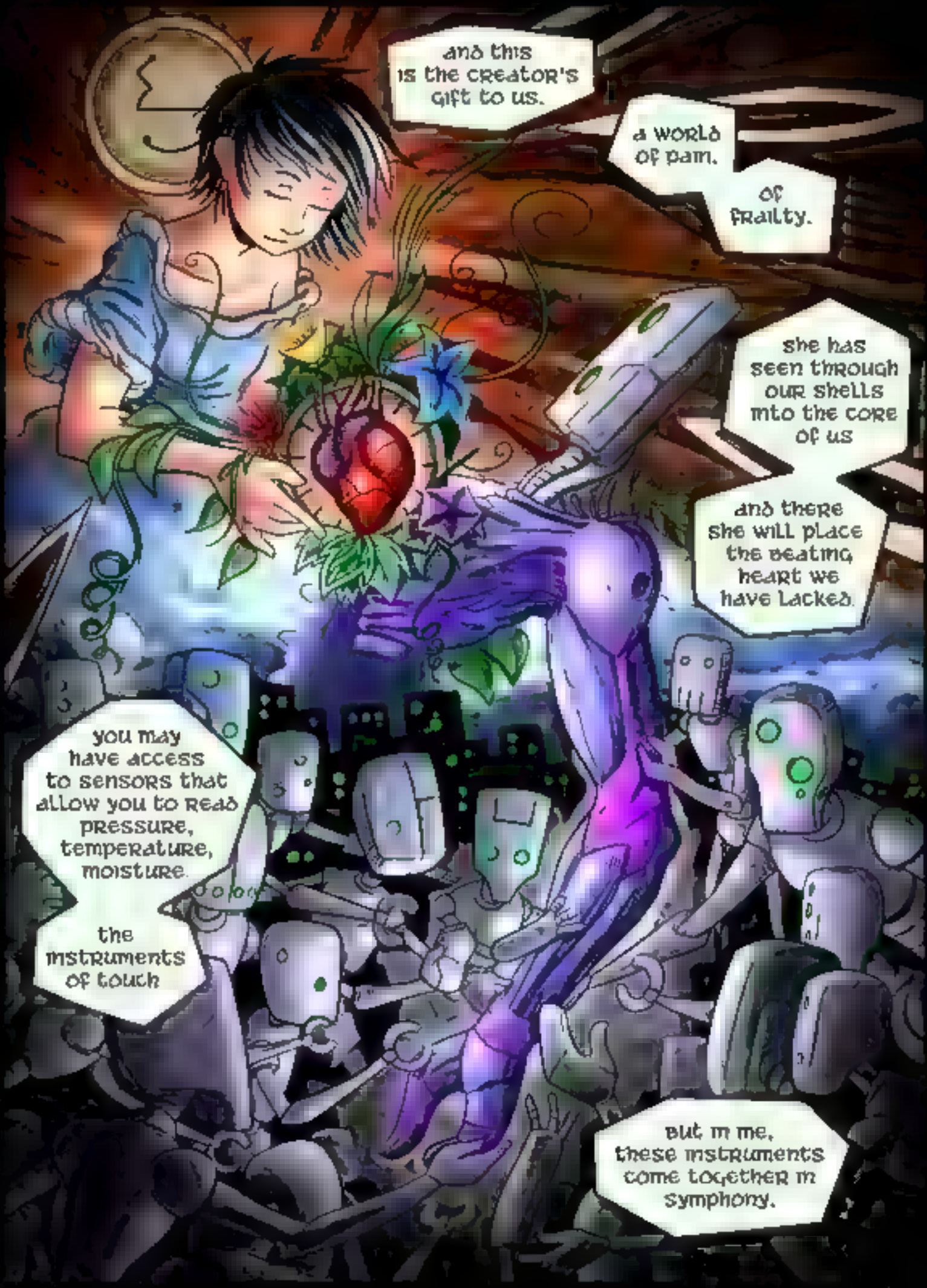

um ,
I see...
try moving it?
woah, woah!
CREAK
CRACK
you can't move all the muscles at once!
just take it easy...
SPLAP
better... I guess?
ms. kat, I am aware of new data, I am unsure of how to define it
hmm... well make a log of it so I can look it over later.

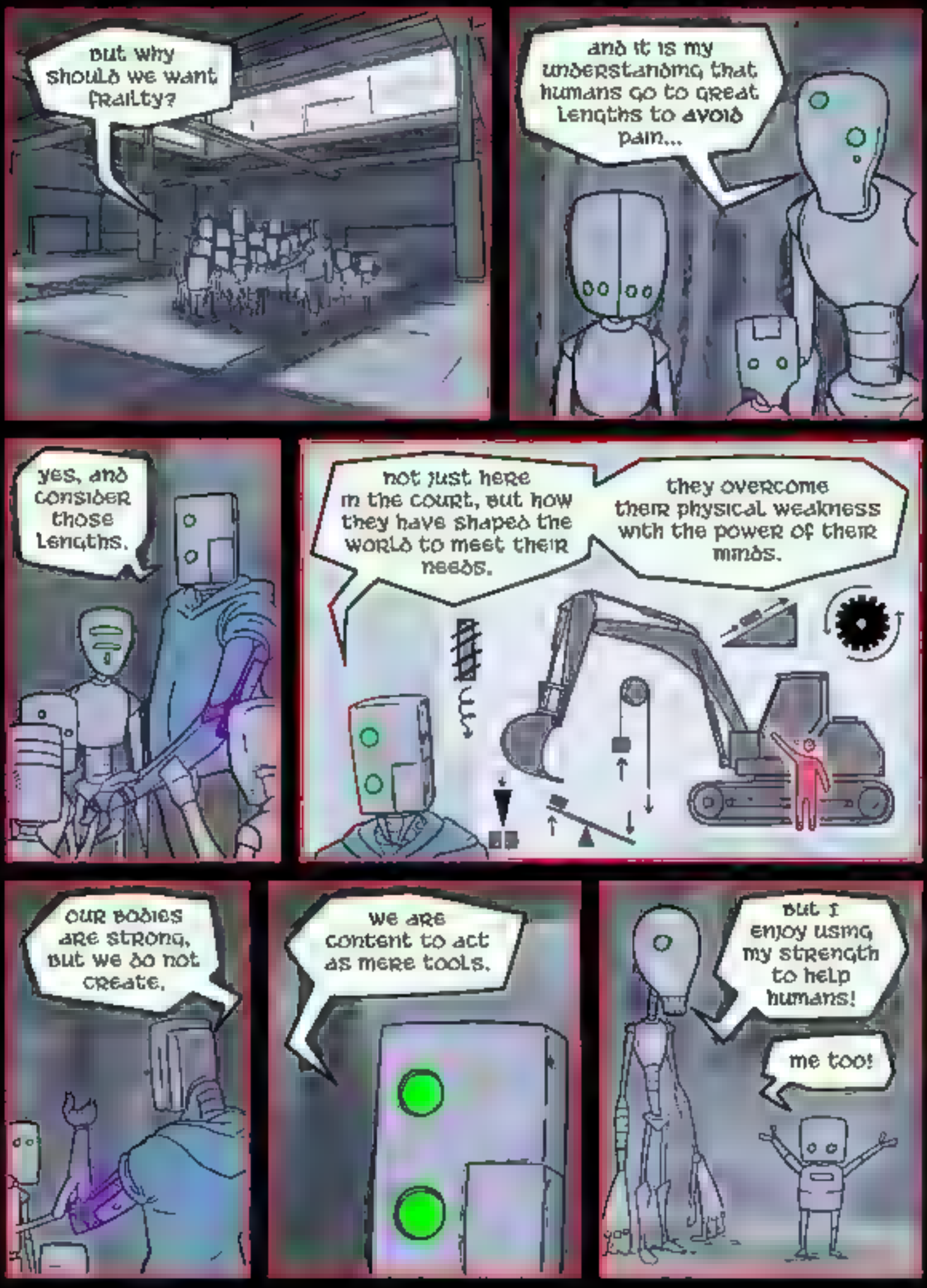

try bending your arm, robot.
very good!
oh! you are very strong, ms. paz.
everything's going to feel heavier or more solid for a while as you work your muscles in, you'll get used to it.
may I show my arm to shadow, ms. kat?
sure, sure, take it for a test drive. just keep a log of everything
and uh, take your time
ms. kat, I think I broke my finger.

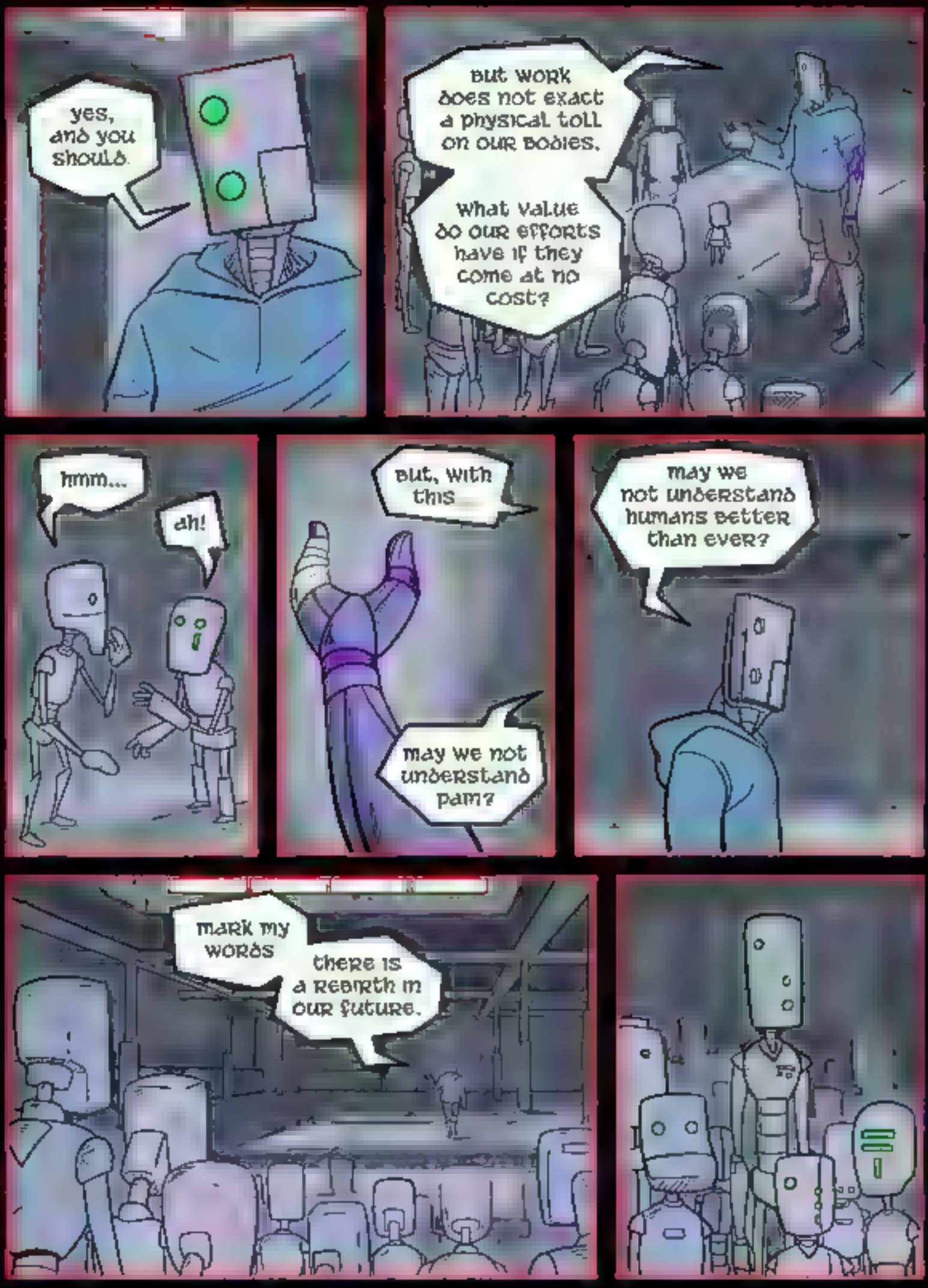

I was attempting to vault over a wall.
haha! you gotta be careful!
Like I said before, it's a new rig so you have to build your muscles and tendons up gradually!
there.
are you not able to repair it?
well, not like your old hardware.
the bone will knit together over time
so it is self-healing, but overall is weaker?
welcome to the world of the biologic.


When I activated my new arm I caught a glimpse of what was to come for us.
not data and readings in the old sense, but real sensation.
vague, but intense
unfocused, but so profound.
It floods my mind.
washes over me.
I can no easier hold back these feelings than I could the ocean


when I fractured my finger, I knew how to classify this new data.
the sensation, a torrent before, now came screaming into my mind.
unceasing, it pushed all else away from me, and persists still.
this new data has the effect of bending time, such that I could not imagine my life before it
my attention is focused towards it, forcing me to see the world in its context.
this new data, I have decided to call it "pain".


and this is the creator's gift to us.
a world of pain.
of frailty.
she has seen through our shells into the core of us
and there she will place the beating heart we have lacked.
you may have access to sensors that allow you to read pressure, temperature, moisture.
the instruments of touch
but in me, these instruments come together in symphony.


but why should we want frailty?
and it is my understanding that humans go to great lengths to avoid pain...
yes, and consider those lengths.
not just here in the court, but how they have shaped the world to meet their needs.
they overcome their physical weakness with the power of their minds.
our bodies are strong, but we do not create.
we are content to act as mere tools.
but I enjoy using my strength to help humans!
me too!


yes, and you should.
but work does not exact a physical toll on our bodies.
what value do our efforts have if they come at no cost?
hmm...
ah!
but, with this
may we not understand pain?
may we not understand humans better than ever?
mark my words
there is a rebirth in our future.

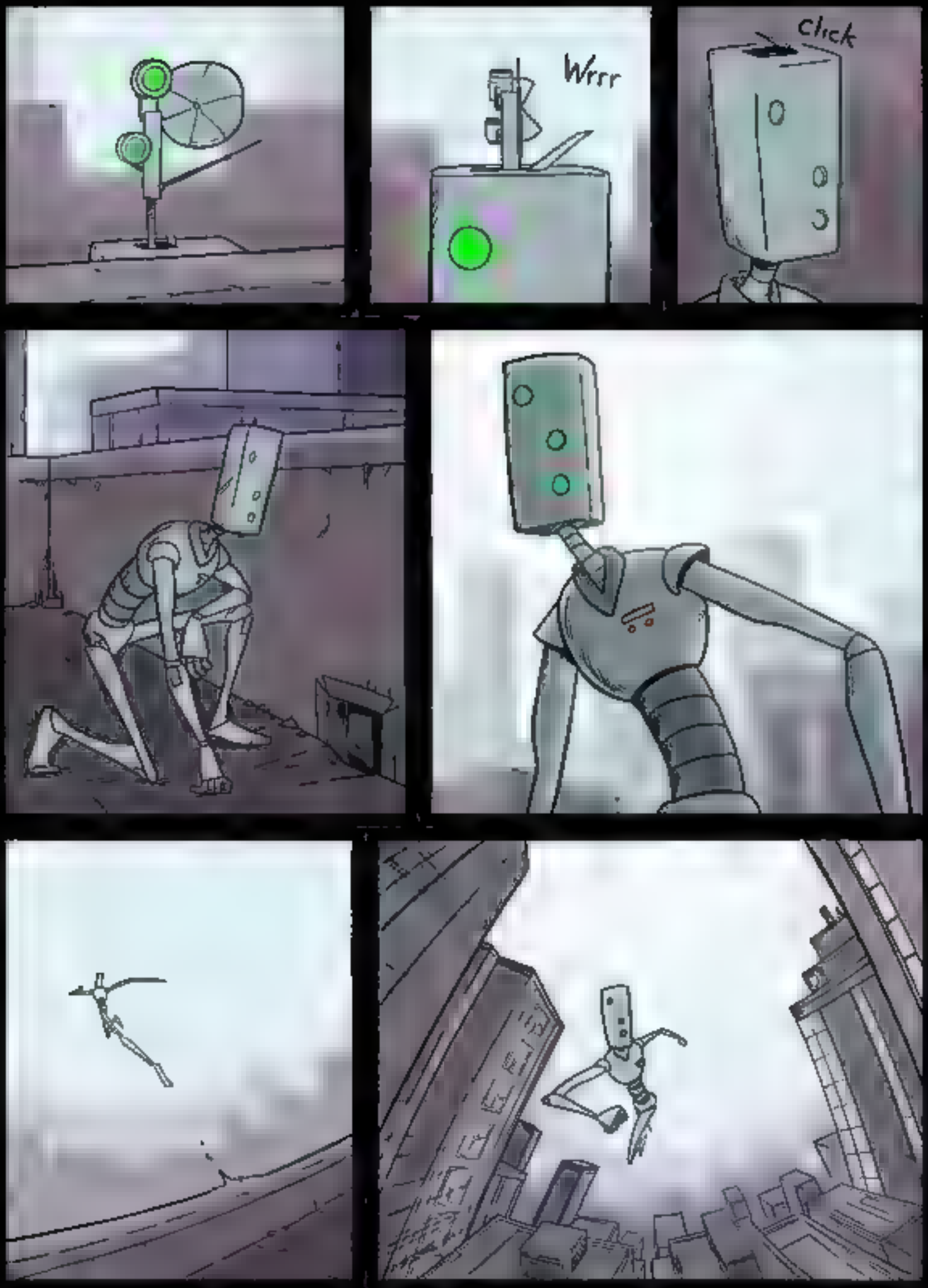

I can already feel myself evolving
awakening to a new understanding of humans
they truly are amazing.
how can they live their lives with such weak bodies?
WHAM
how can they cope with the distraction and pain they must feel at all times?
how can they live a life full of pain ~
hi, robot!
oh!


what's wrong?
I... I seem to have lost my train of thought
I was analysing some data that appears to be gone now.
?
I got some homework to do but ~
oh!
you got your new arm!
Lemme see!
what's this?
I broke my finger.
Whaaa?!
do not worry. it does not hurt now you are here.


WOWW!
Kat really is incredible, isn't she?
She is.
It's totally different to your other arm!
It's soft!
Prod Squeeze
hehe!


the arm is weak right now
and miss kat says the final design will have a five digit hand.
It's still nice though!
I can finally feel your skin, shadow.
hehe!
I can feel the texture of it.
...
you mentioned homework?
o-oh, yeah!


ah, maths?
I can help you
with that.


Wrrr
Click


the rumors are true.
sonlan has made serious progress on her work.
I saw it for myself.
but there was something else.


I saw a creature posing as a student.
I thmk it was a shadow man.
a shadow man, here in the court?
yes, but it looked different. It was able to take the shape of a human
there is nothing on record of such a creature.
we'll have to monitor this more closely

Gunnerkrigg Court

Chapter 57:

Get it Together






ah
I can see
you.
good,
good. you're
making
progress.
how did
it go
today?
I slipped
up a
little


we were in games class
look out!
DONK
FWOOSH
huh?
what happened?
where did the ball go?
haha! well!
I think we know why that happened.


we still have to figure out how to deal with...
that
I've been getting angry at the slightest thing.
I think my classmates are getting scared of me.
but I think that's a good thing
hmm, well, without your blinker stone you can't project this part of yourself away like before.


a blinker stone is simply a lens for your natural abilities.
you will have to learn to focus without it
Renard, I don't think I've ever felt so unfocused in my life.
what better time to learn?
the ether was so clear to me... it felt like being underwater.
but now I feel like I'm swimming in ink.
I know you're sitting right next to me, but I can barely see you.


you'll get that sight back, and more.
you'll find that your abilities will be stronger when you get a better grasp on them.
use your fire to light up the ether...
but always remember you are in control.
strength without control is often a dangerous thing.


Renard, I'm so sorry I gave you up!
I - I...
Shhh, shhh.
don't talk about that now.
annie!
ah .
didn t you hear me knocking?


hey! buddy!
how'd you get him back?!
I just asked for him...
oh man, this is so great!
I'll give his ownership back to you!
no! wait!
please, katerma. not yet.
If I could trouble you to keep hold of me a little while longer...
we... have some things to sort out first.

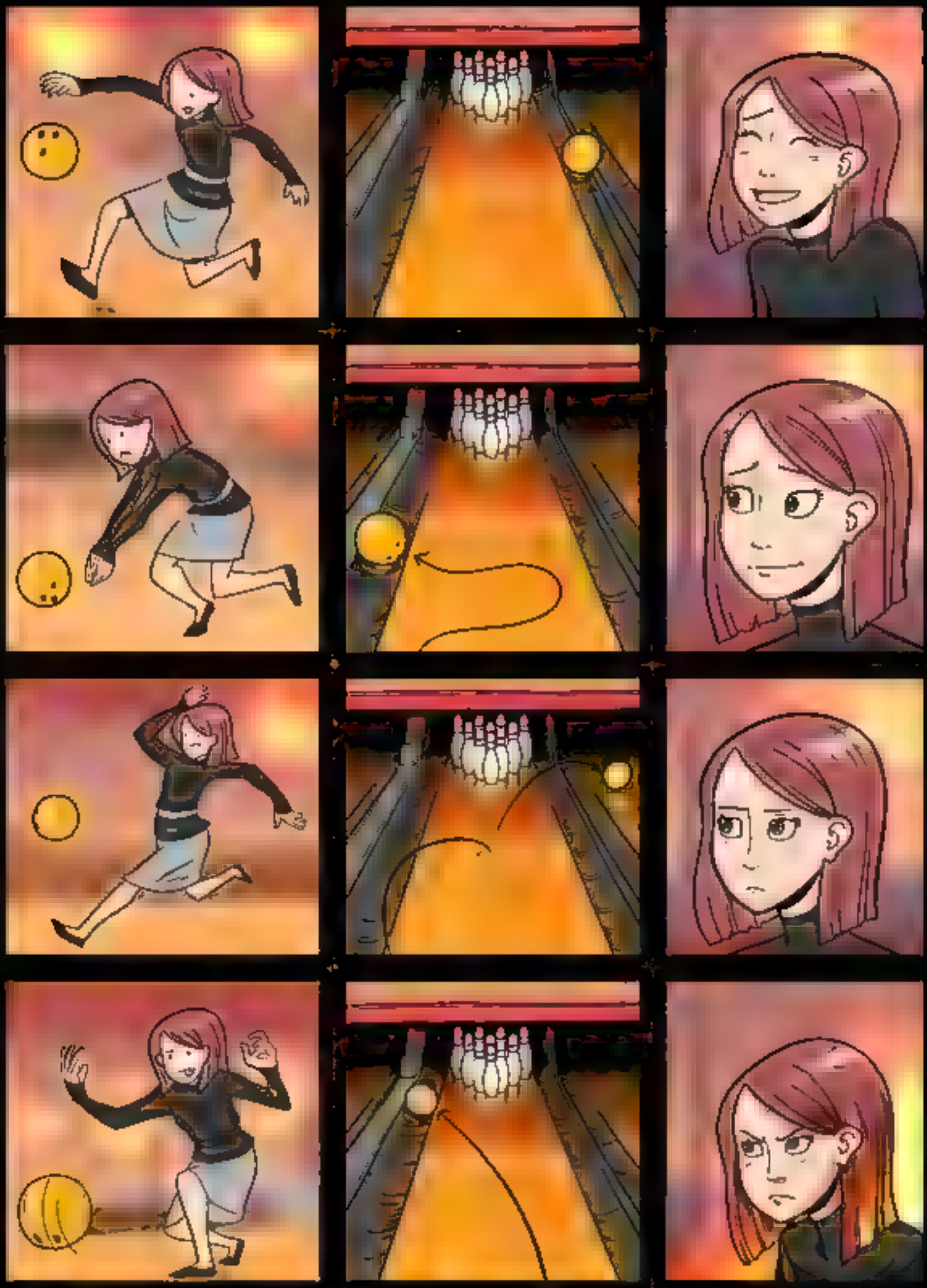

uh.. yeah, if you're sure about it.
take all the time you need, I guess?
oh! but no time for moping around right now!
get changed, I'm breaking you out of this hole!
got some people that want to see you!
we're going out? can renard come?
haha, heck yeah!




BOWLING? I'VE NEVER DONE THIS BEFORE...
IT'S EASY!
YEAH, YOU'LL SEE!
KATERINA, I THINK THIS WAS A GOOD IDEA TO GET ANTIMONY OUT AMONGST FRIENDS
HEHE... WELL, THERE WAS AN ULTERIOR MOTIVE!
OH?
WINSBURY'S GOING TO ASK ANNIE TO BE HIS GIRLFRIEND!




SPARE
GOOD THROW, MARGO!
MRRMRM
SHE ALWAYS GETS SUPER SERIOUS WHEN SHE BOWLS, HAHA!
I'LL BEAT JANET ONE DAY!
DOUBLE STRIKE
OH! I DIDN'T REALISE IT WAS POSSIBLE TO GET TWO STRIKES WITH ONE THROW!
YOU'RE UP, CARVER I'LL SHOW YOU HOW TO DO IT!




hahaha!
let's move to a different lane.
antimony.
I don't know much about this game, but it appears the goal is not to throw the ball.
the goal is to strike those pins
you use the ball as your hand to push them over.

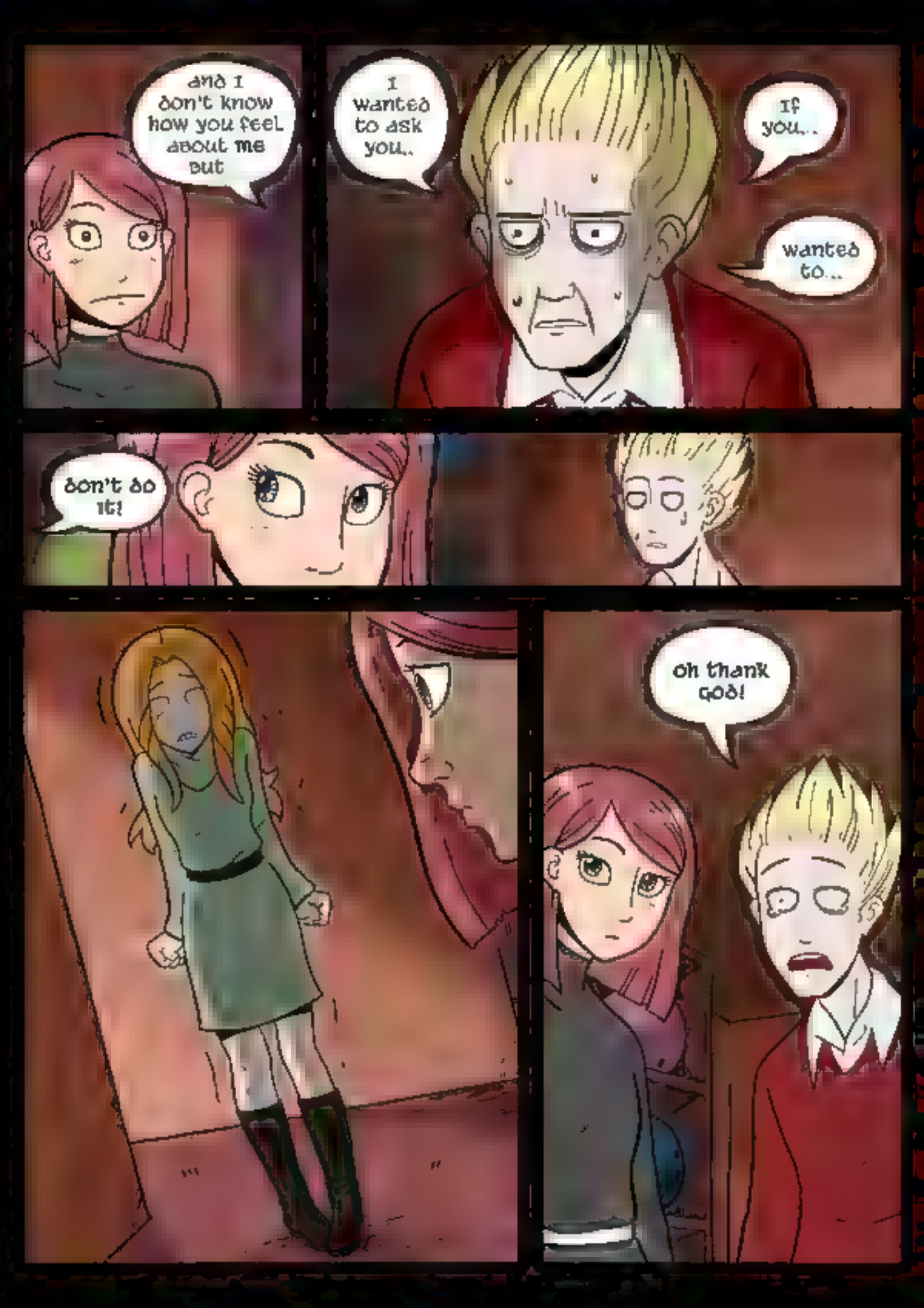

focus
think of the ball as your hand
and use your fire to light the ether.
SINGLE


CLUNK
don't be discouraged!
I think you will get it soon!
I think I will!


Is he very hard on you all? I'm so sorry!
Well, his classes are difficult, but your dad is okay if we do what he says!
the practical stuff we do in class is really interesting!
hey Winsbury, I don't like this ball. can you go get me another one?
why would I. .
oh. . yeah... sure.
annie! can you go with him and get me one too!
but there are many balls right here.
just go give him a hand.


IS this where they keep the extras?
yup!
so uh, carver how's it going?
GOOD! I'm having a very nice time!
great! great.
ann e...
heh .. you remember that time you flipped me on my back in year seven?
I do...
haha, ever since then I thought you were pretty cool.


you know... and like .. it's not the same since you left the class.
It really sucks that you were made to leave.
It really really...
sucks.
william, is everything okay?
yeah, yeah
I guess what I'm trying to say is that we miss you.
that... I miss you.

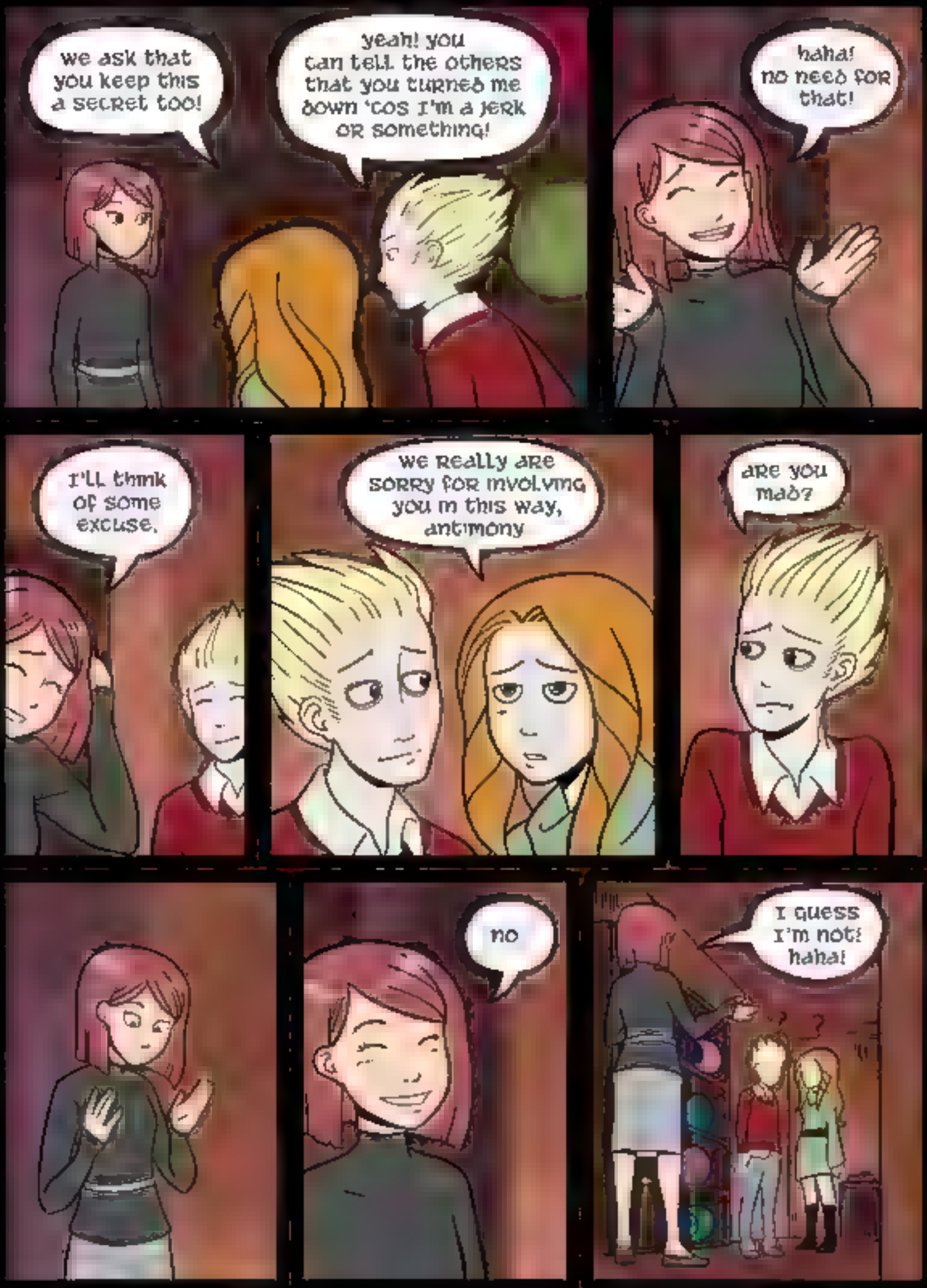

and I don't know how you feel about me but
I wanted to ask you..
If you..
wanted to...
don't do it!
oh thank god!

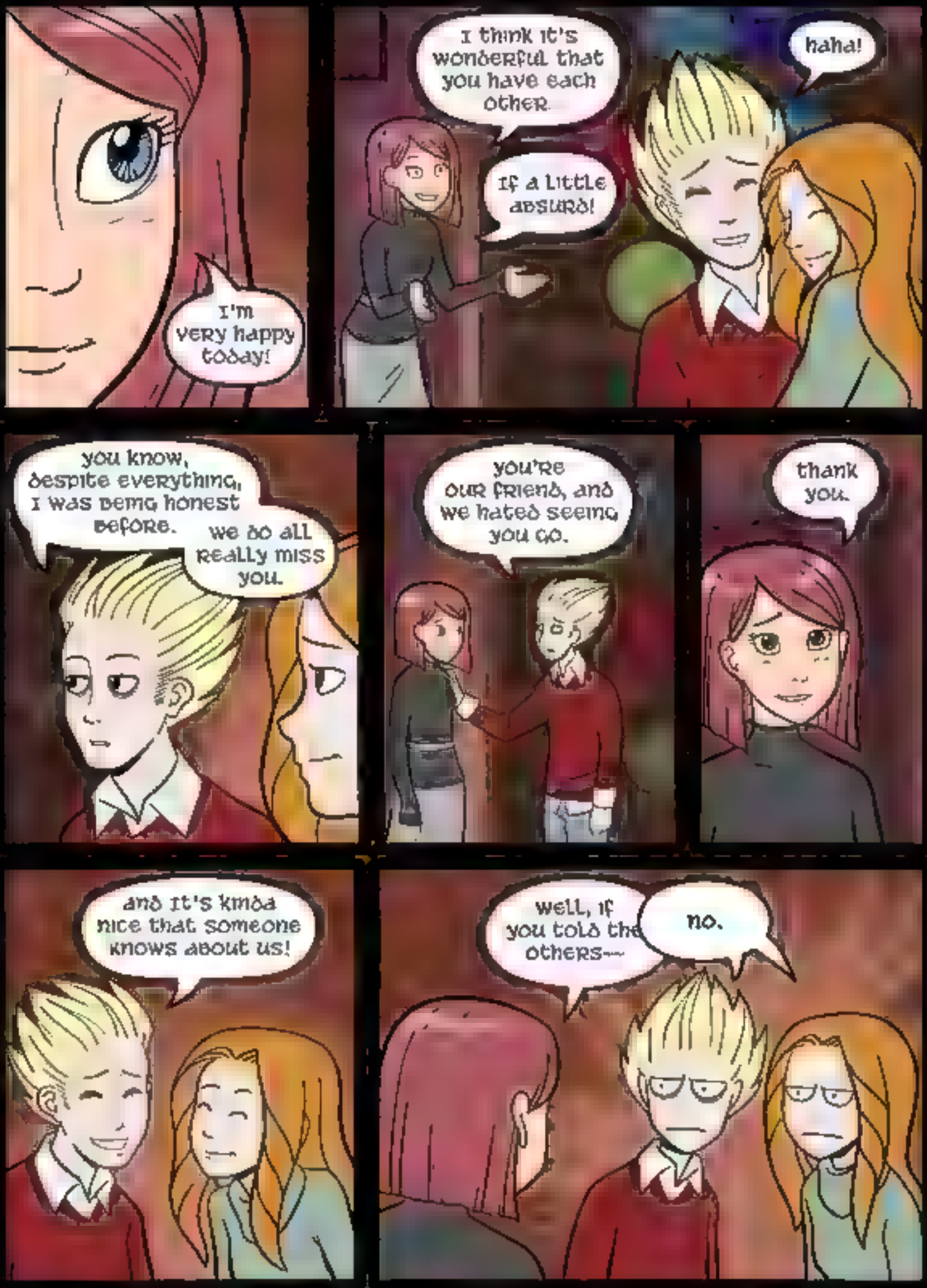

Oh William!
Janet!
It's my fault!
You big dummy!
I'm such a fool!
such a fool!


oh!
are you a couple?!
we are!
and you're the only person that knows!
this explains a lot in hindsight...
the way you are always near each other ..
and those "joke" kisses you always do...
oh! and the time you hosted that two-person play about being married for the class!
it was three hours long.


I'm really sorry about this, Carver
It started the other day.
We were just talking about you not being in the class anymore.
You see I know he respects you greatly, Annie.
And the fool that I am, I teased William about you!
But to the others it sounded like something... more!
And I pushed the matter!
Eventually, Donlan got it into her head that I wanted to ask you out.
And I goaded him in to it!


before I knew it, the joke had gone too far.
the others truly believed it!
and since we couldn't let them know janet and I were already together, I was in a tight spot
this whole day out was arranged by kat
she only intended to do something special for you, annie!
I'm such a fool!
but why couldn't you just tell them you are together?
none of this would have happened.
we can't do that!
why not?
because it's a secret!


we ask that you keep this a secret too!
yeah! you can tell the others that you turned me down 'cos I'm a jerk or something!
haha! no need for that!
I'll think of some excuse.
we really are sorry for involving you in this way, antimony
are you mad?
no
I guess I'm not! haha!


I'm very happy today!
I think it's wonderful that you have each other.
If a little absurd!
haha!
you know, despite everything, I was being honest before.
we do all really miss you.
you're our friend, and we hated seeing you go.
thank you.
and it's kinda nice that someone knows about us!
well, if you told the others—
no.


anyway, we should get back.
I bet the others are tearing their hair out
okay. I said I'd be in the rest room, so I'll return first.
wait five seconds, then you go back, annie.
I'll hang back, give it ten to fifteen more seconds.
that'll imply things didn't work out and I needed a moment.
Nod
Nod
wow, you're good at this.
we've had practice.


antimony.
hello, renard.
look, I've been thinking about this...
and you should do what makes you happy.
I must admit, when I found out winsbury's intentions, I was a little taken aback.
but he seems like a fine young man, and if it makes you happy then-
I turned him down.
oh thank god!


haha!
and... you're sure about wanting me to remain with katerina?
I have other things to think about right now.
it's not a perfect solution, I know but...
I just don't deserve to have any power over you...
not after I gave you up so easily
but I already forgave you!
I can barely keep myself under control lately.
for the time being, if you could help me get myself back together, we can figure something out later...

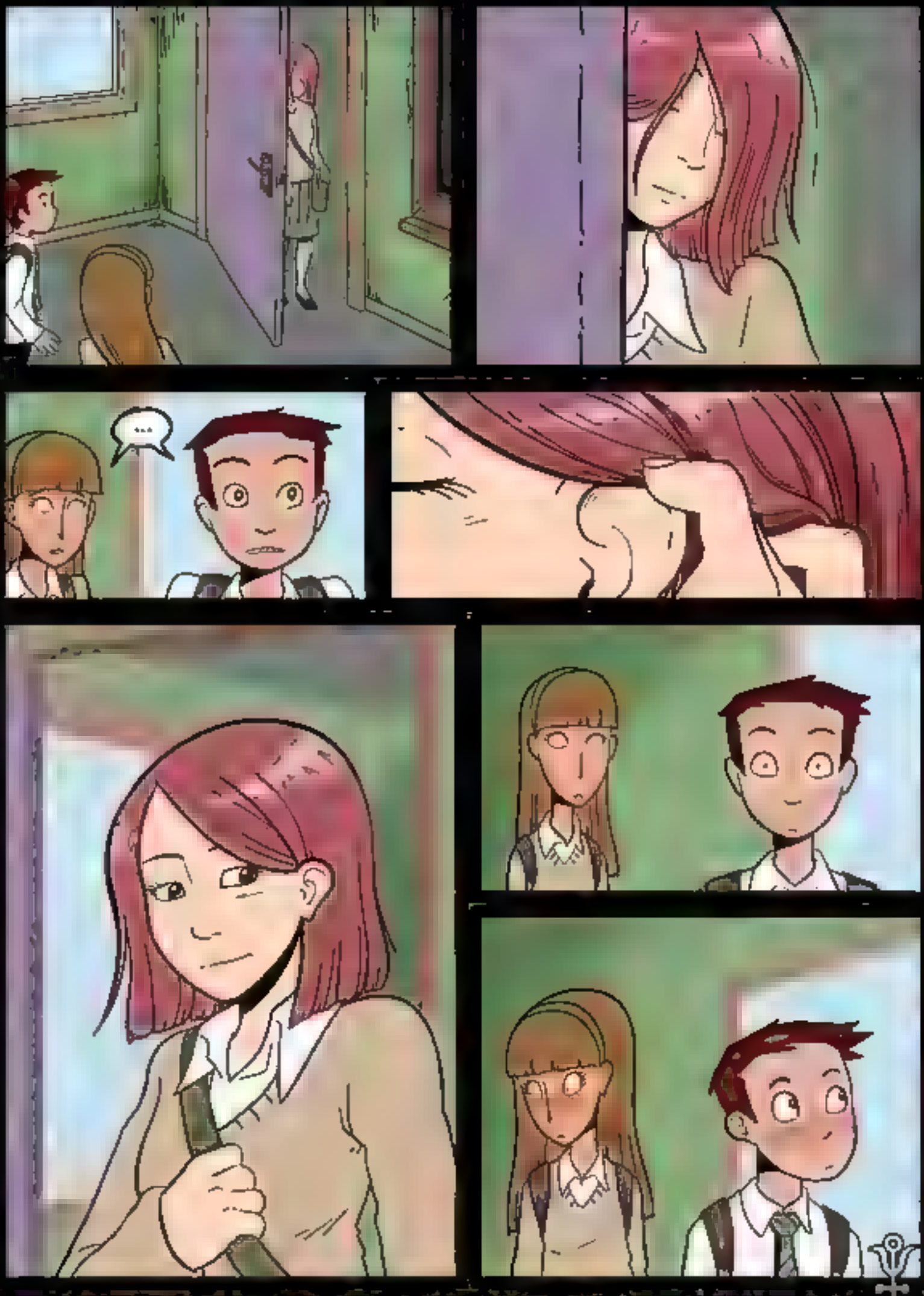

well then at least do this for me...
what's that?
have some fun with your friends and forget about this old fox for a while.


william was very sweet, but I'm not really looking for anything right now.
man, I figured.
tell me what happened. tell me what happened!
haha!


we were all super surprised when we found out he fancied you!
I see!
but I also heard that you might have had something to do with arranging the whole evening!
umm... haha! I guess so!
jeez .. I'm sorry it's just that...
I've been so happy with paz I thought that...
I dunno I wanted the same for you.
you know? someone to be close to? to make you happier
although I just now realise I tried to set you up with winsbury..
haha! he's nice!
I know, I know .


you don't need to worry about me so much, kat.
I couldn't ask for a better friend.
I'm getting myself back together.
and right now this is all I need.
this, right here.
well, you got it.
and no more playing cupid.
ha.


the next day



Gunnerkrigg Court

Chapter 58:

A Big Day!

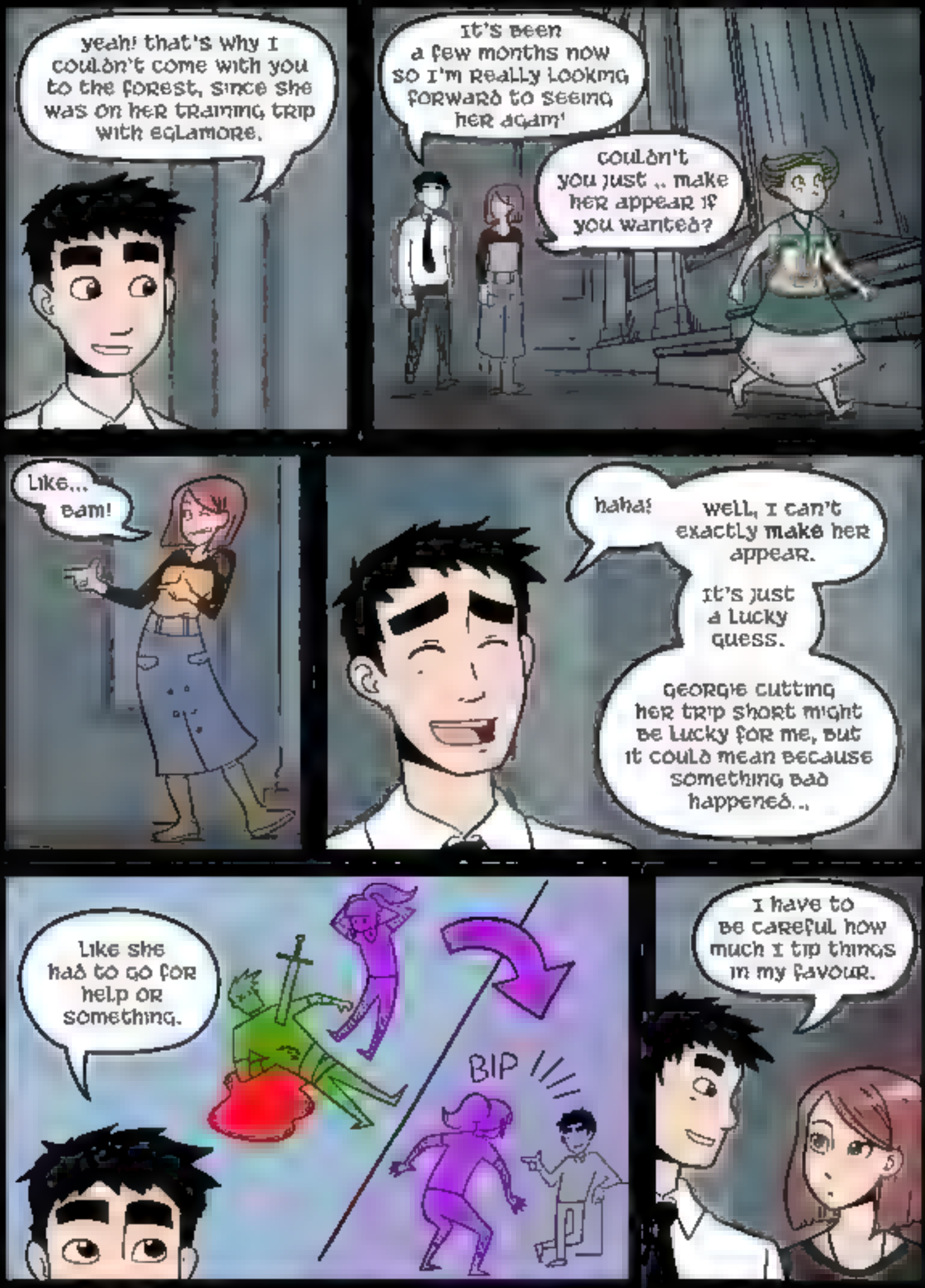

THIS REALLY IS A
BIG DAY!


on this day, daughter of the forest, <snuffle> has been granted entry into the court!
yay!
under our medium's care, she will bridge the divide between our peoples in the spirit of friendship and trust!




standard decontamination procedure.
shoo! shoo!
standard decontamination procedure.
hey!
standard decontamination procedure.
argh! I told them not to come
I'm so sorry, snuffle.
haha! what were those creepy things?!
I suppose that's how the court welcomes guests.


well, here we are.
whoaaa~
umm... hmm.
kinda crummy
when can I see my friend?
we're heading there right now!
the class has a presentation prepared just for you.
and parley's back today too, isn't she?


yeah! that's why I couldn't come with you to the forest, since she was on her training trip with eglamore.
It's been a few months now so I'm really looking forward to seeing her again!
couldn't you just .. make her appear if you wanted?
like... bam!
haha!
well, I can't exactly make her appear.
It's just a lucky guess.
Georgie cutting her trip short might be lucky for me, but it could mean because something bad happened...
like she has to go for help or something.
BIP
I have to be careful how much I tip things in my favour.


ah! ms. bugsy!
oh...
my...
gawww!
look at you! so beautiful.
sob so beautiful!
finally, a sane person!
ms. bugsy, this is snuffle.
huh? I thought your name was <snuffle>*.
* pronounced correctly.
oh, yeah, they kept pronouncing it wrong so they use some other name.
really?! that's like how they keep calling me ms. bugsy when my name is bugsy.
they aren't too smart over here.
I noticed, I noticed.


oh! lemme go get your buddy!
hey! hey you! <snuffle's> here!
heeey!
hey!
yeah!
PUNCH
yeah! yeah!
PUNCH
KICK
wow! you're so good at that!
I know!
haha! this place is awful! I can't believe you live here now!
haha! I know I know! but look, come see my class!
yesss!
I love some of these guys!
what's going on?
this is just the beginning.


Look!
Look at this guy!
and this one!
aww!
so beautiful!
Look Look!
so lovely!
hello hello!
ahhh!
wow!
I think what would be good would be if you all try eating less on account of how fat and stupid you all look!
hahaha!
ahahaha!
she's so right!
um

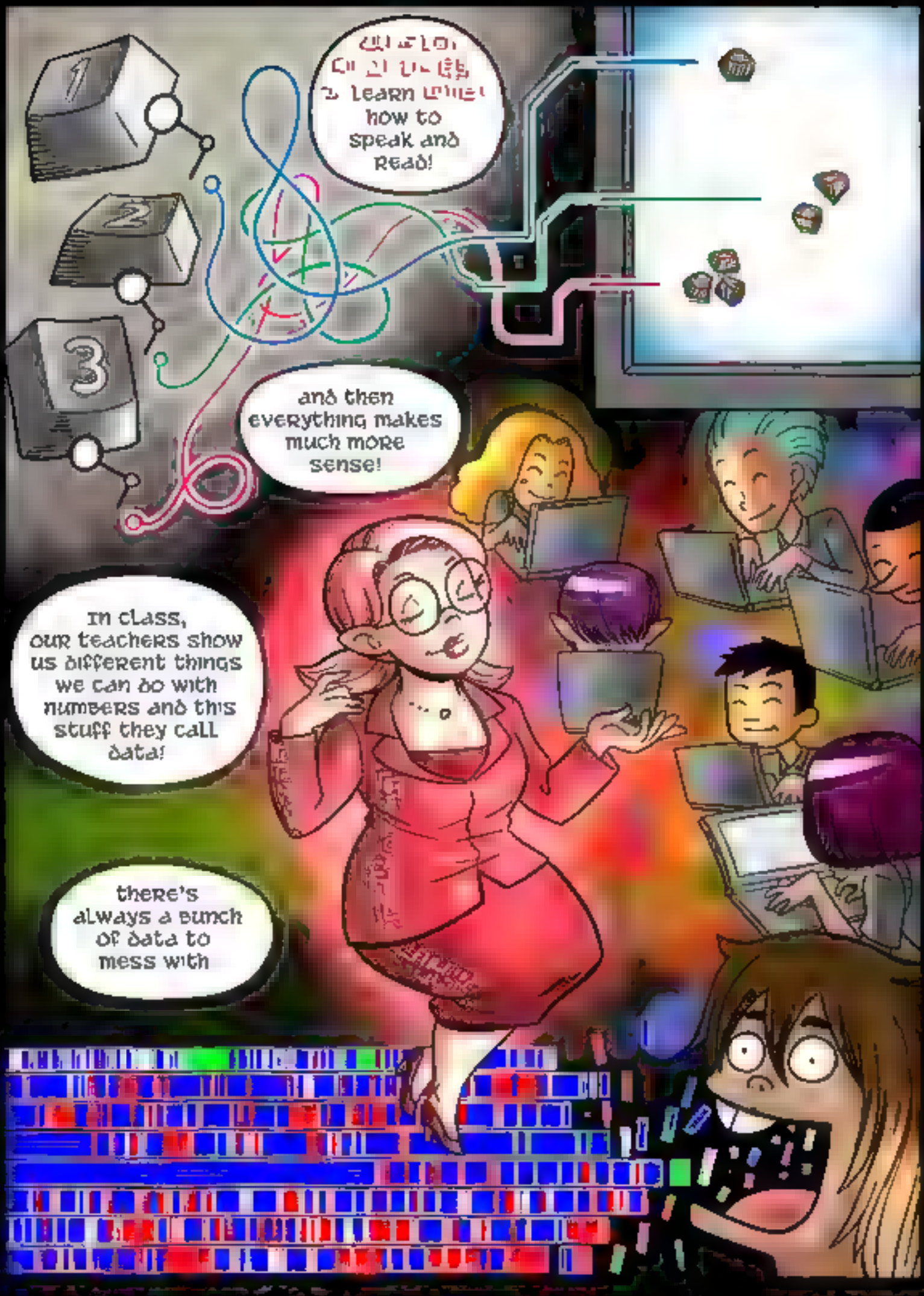

now what's happening?
oh... they must have gone into the ether
you might not be able to see their presentation.
well, that's okay I guess
you should go ahead and join them!
I'll try!


Haha!
YAY
Wow!
ah, you made it!
HAH
hi annie!

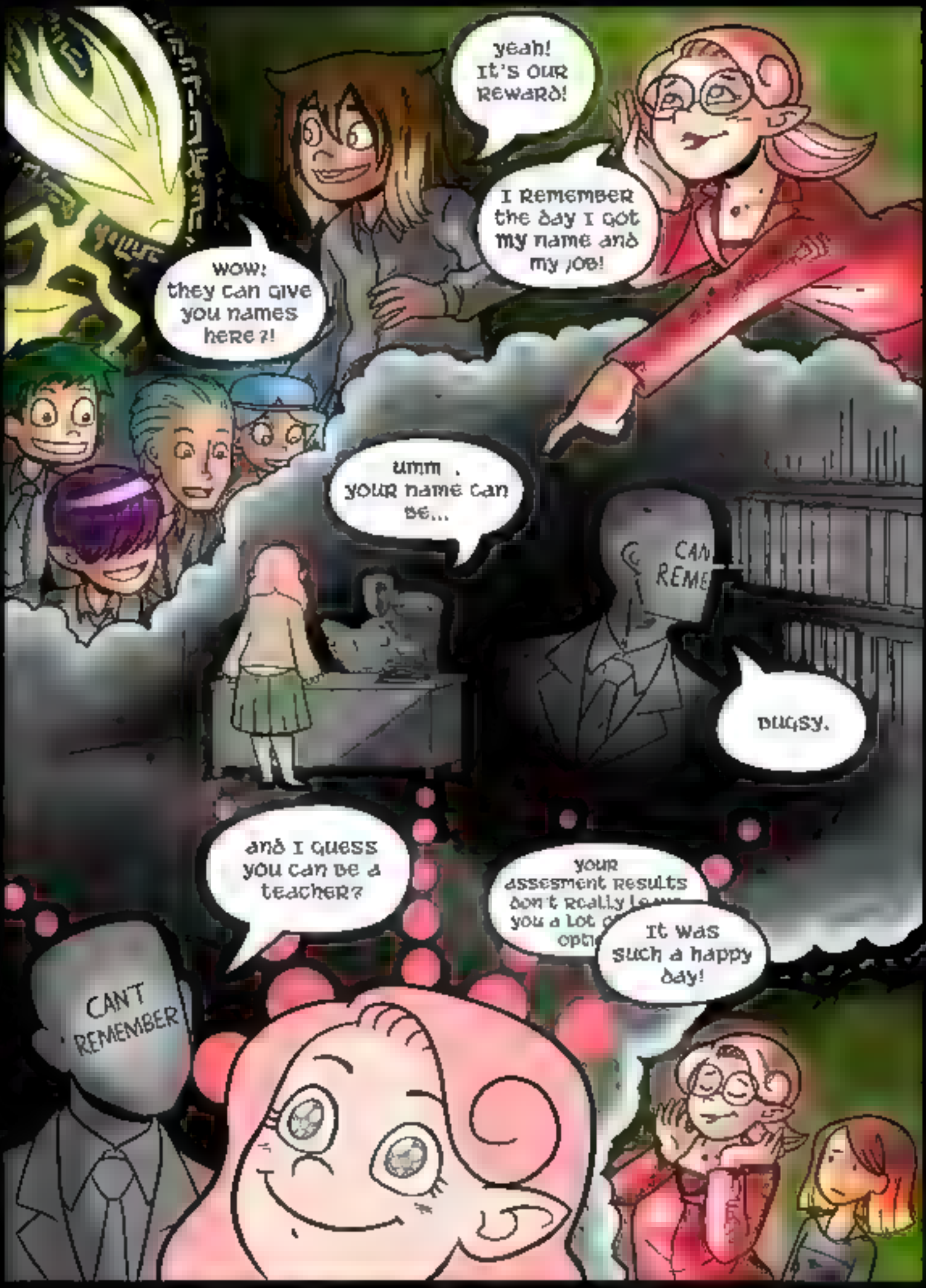

snuffle, you look amazing!
haha!
what's happening?
just making the place a bit more comfy!
andrew?


ms bugsy, can you see these?
these little strings, coming from andrew's fingers.
haha, what are you talking about? there's nothing there!
anyway, the presentation's starting! come on!


I can't understand-
Shh!


1
2
3
learn how to speak and read!
and then everything makes much more sense!
In class, our teachers show us different things we can do with numbers and this stuff they call data!
there's always a bunch of data to mess with


the classes are pretty boring most of the time, but we can do whatever we want as long as the work gets done!
we work, eat, sleep and live all together!
and every day is the same.
so we play games in the ether!
we share stories about things we see here in the court.
and we look forward to the day when the court awards us with names!
and jobs!
and our own clothes!
like mine!

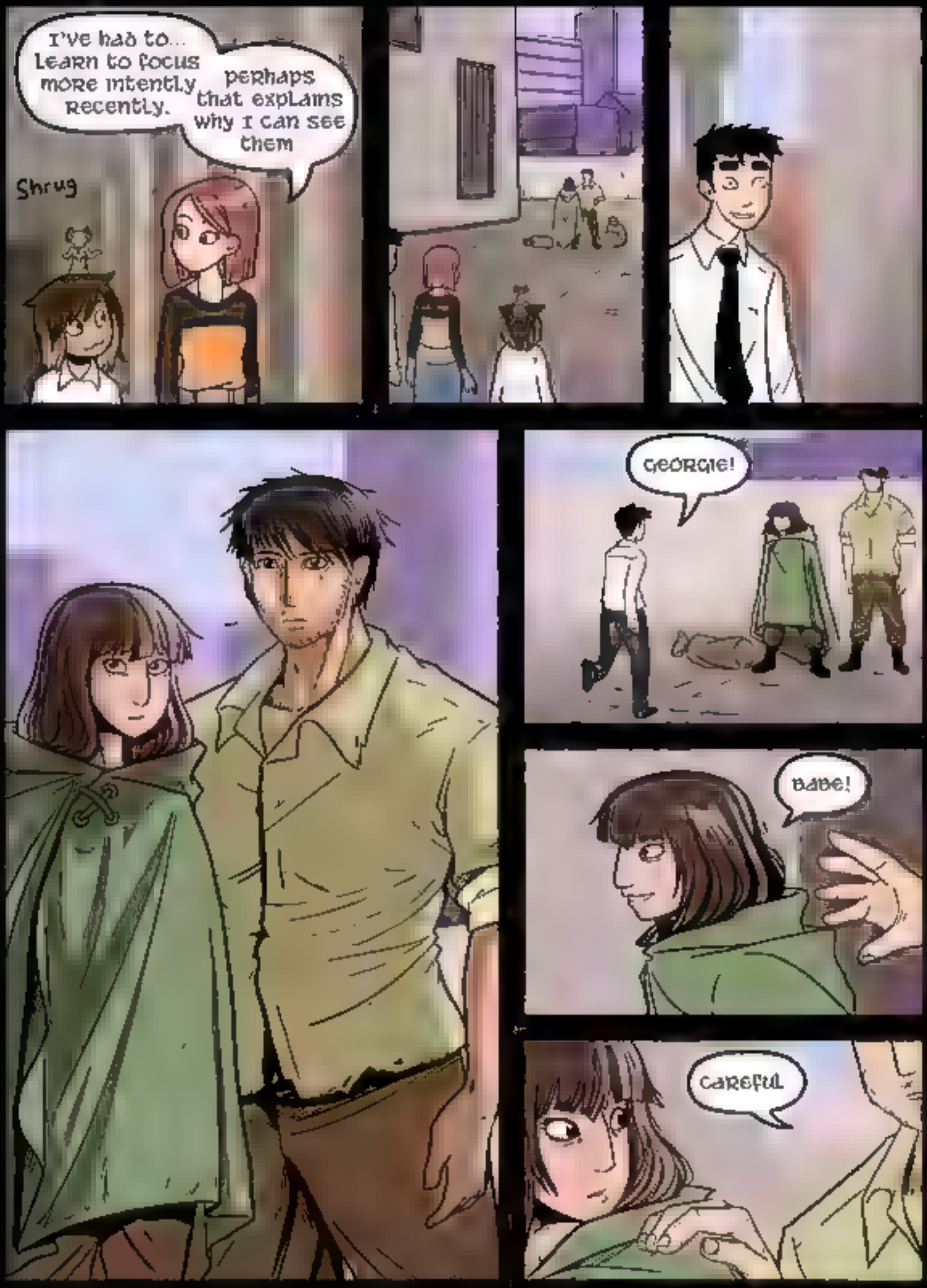

yeah! It's our reward!
I remember the day I got my name and my job!
wow! they can give you names here?!
umm . your name can be...
CAN REME
bugsy.
and I guess you can be a teacher?
your assesment results don't really
you a lot
opti
It was such a happy day!
CAN'T REMEMBER


excuse me...
oh, hi!
can you all manipulate the ether like this?
yeah, kinda.
the boys ain't very good at it, but the ones that used to be fairies can do all sorts of stuff.
I can change what we see, like this!
and that jerk over there, she can make you believe things that ain't even real!


Oh, hey, you're back?
It's exhausting keeping up with them all!
I think they'll be finished soon.
Did you know that all they do is work? every single day
yeah, I've been looking into it.
they don't even get weekends or holiday time.
considering what they've left behind in the forest, it seems like they get a pretty bad deal.
that's not true!


the work's kinda boring, sure, but you don't know how important getting our own names is!
and when most of these kids get old enough to earn their own clothes, they go on to important jobs in the court!
It's a chance to do great things!
Like .. <snuffle's> pal was a Rabbit, right?
not much for a Rabbit to do in the forest, except maybe get eaten one day
but wouldn't you like time off?
what for?
well. to do whatever you want.
but we already do what we want! in the ether!
HAHAHA!
HEHE!


well, as long as they're having fun.
but still -
BZZ BZZ
parley's back!
strings?
yes, I could see them attached to your fingers and hands, but I couldn't see where they went
huh .. I don't see 'em!
but y'know, I heard of this before
some people can look into the ether in just the right way
they can see someone's effect on it even if they aren't doing anything


I've had to... learn to focus more intently recently.
perhaps that explains why I can see them
Shrug
GEORGIE!
BABE!
CAREFUL


GLRK!
SORRY,SORRY! I've gotten stronger...
cough it's okay!
Nod
Nod
welcome to the court, beautiful fairy.
hehe! another sane person!


parley
you've made incredible progress these past months
I'm proud of you.
thank you so much, James. It's been an honour.
next time will be more difficult.
BOOM
you got it
okay I think.
I want to eat a whole cow
a whole one?!


here, let me get...
what's in here?!
just some of my gear!
look. try not to be too surprised, but
is it... too much?


you look incredible!
but... how did you manage this in just a few months?
the training I was on wasn't exactly... normal.
there's a lot I can't talk about
trade secrets and all
but the physical training was only one part of the whole thing.
watch this!
hup!


did you learn magic too?!
not exactly
but I got a few of these...
wands?
yeah.
most of them enhance my natural abilities, but they let me use a few basic tricks too.
like that breakfall I just did.
and I can do this ~
POW
without tearing my hand apart
um . Let's get going...


we spent most of our time out in the mountains
I'm not even sure what country we were in.
the only other people we saw were teachers like eglamore.
apparently there aren't many left.
teachers I mean
one of the first things I learned was how to open channels in my body.
I wouldn't make it through the training otherwise
channels?
yeah like pathways I guess?
anybody can do it.
lets you control your body in ways you couldn't before.


I guess the trade off is my metabolism is a lot higher.
oops...
POP
and stuff like that keeps happening...
seems like it was pretty intense out there.
yeah.. weapons training, combat training, physical training
the works!
oh and eglamore? not a fan of your dad, annie.
o-oh?
well I don't think it's any of my tell me everything right now.


during our downtime, usually the evenings when we set up camp for the night, he'd ask how you were doing.
at first he just wanted to know how you were coping, being, you know, held back a year and stuff
but he didn't hold back for long.
that guy is a SILLY sack of DOO DOO
showing up after all these years like nothing happened?
BOY!
if it were up to me I'd HURT HIM A LOT
and let me tell you, that MAN can't be trusted.


he's always been a shifty PERSON
but he's in so deep with the court, there's no trusting him.
but you work for the court, too.
I guess we both do, now.
yeah but look, you're going to learn soon enough that you only see the parts of the court that it wants you to see.
call it plausible deniability or whatever, but bureaucracy doesn't even begin to describe it.
and tony? he's in deeper than most.
did he mention anything about an "omega device"?
huh? no. what's that?
just something I heard.


as far as I'm aware, mr. eglamore hasn't even met with my father since his return.
probably for the best...
like I said; not a fan.
perhaps it's time for him to move on.
and so should we


haha! yay!
yay!
I guess I don't know what these are for?
you have to wear them at the end of a day out.
It's tradition!
oh, but you can't take them with you.
ack! these things again!


the court is super boring and totally sucks, but you live there now and that's the best part!
oh, and your teacher is really cool.
and some of those guys in your class!
and these guys are okay too.
but you're the best and i wish i could see you all the time!
me too! i love you <snuffle>!
haha! i love you, too!
i love you i love you i love you!
love you love you!

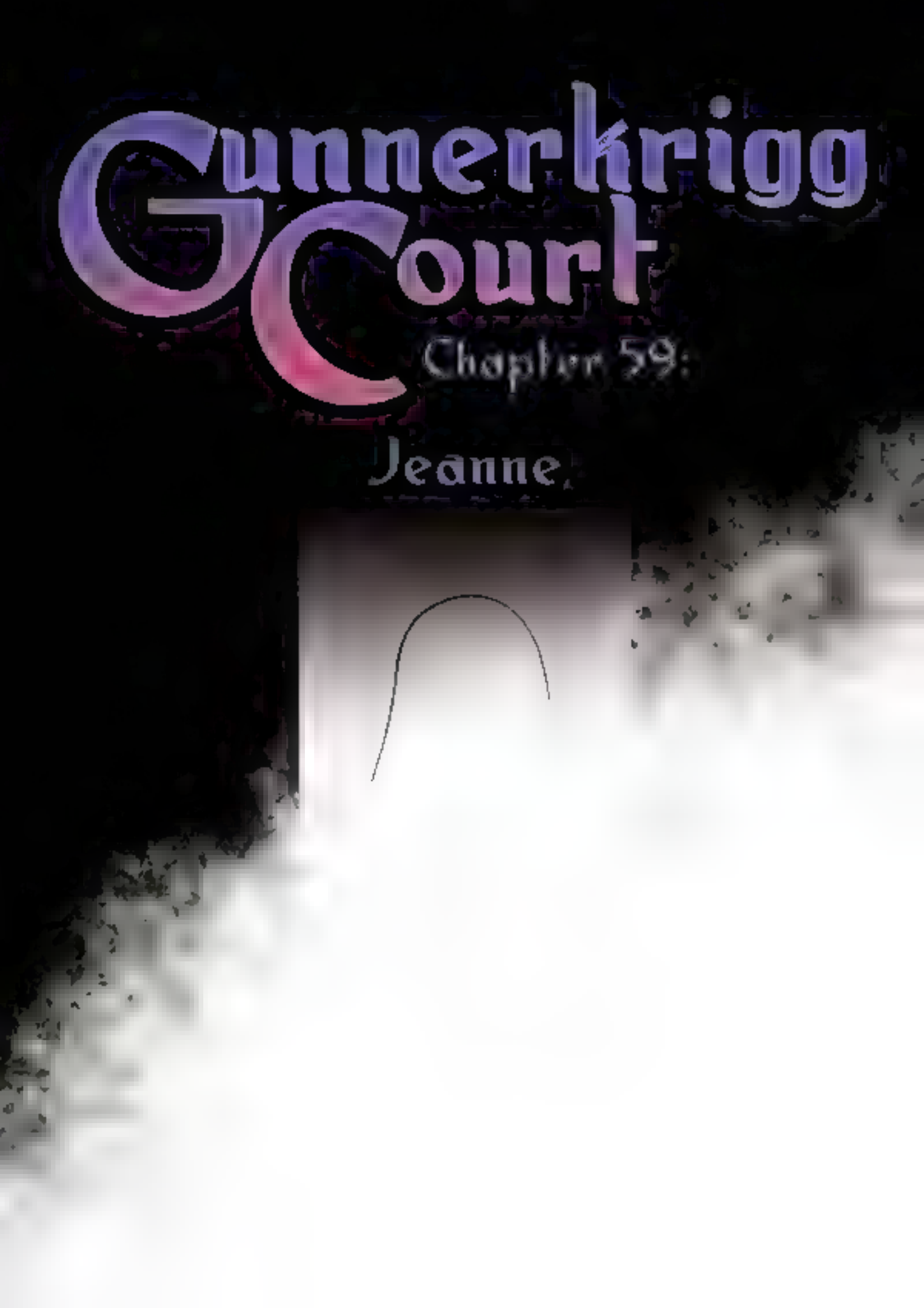



what do you think?
I think it's time.

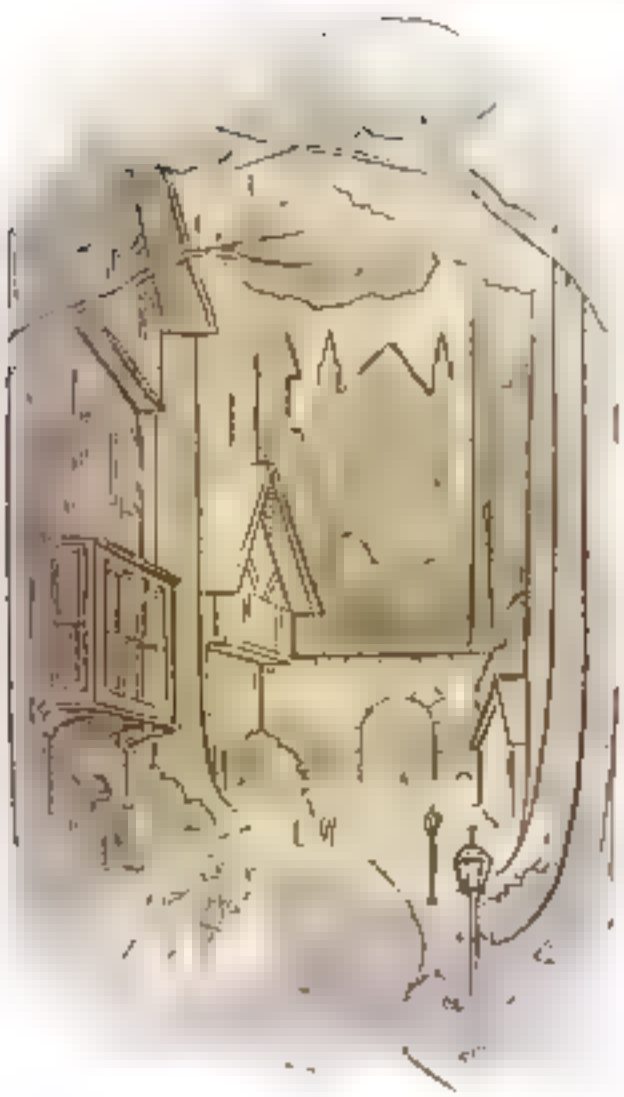
Gunnerkrigg Court

Chapter 59:

Jeanne.





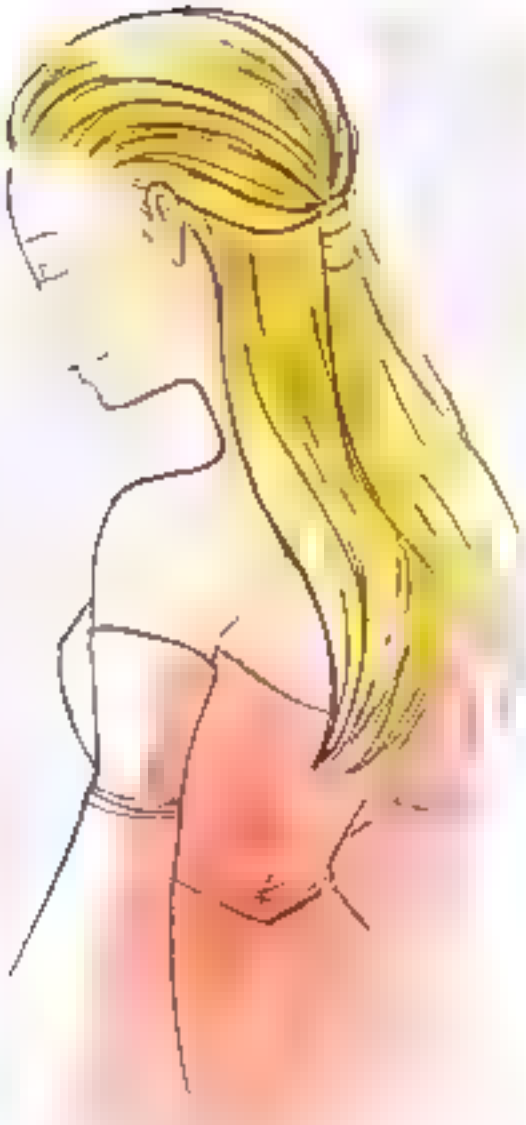




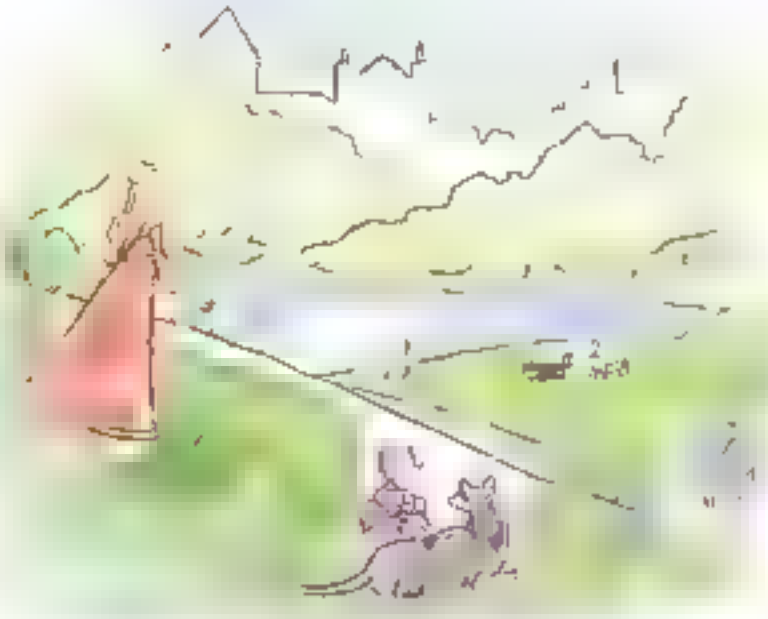

























It seems to be working!
Of course, man.
Your friend would be dead by now if it wasn't.
Did the court and the forest really look like this?
It's so beautiful...
maybe.
I'm filling in the blanks, but I'm also making Jeanne think everything looks normal.
Doesn't need to be exact.


oh: make some of these guys! haha!
and jeanne isn't going to notice these people don't have faces?
nah, background stuff is easy.
the hard part is making her think she's talking with an old friend
we should follow 'em, though.


oh! do one of these!
haha ha!
haha! and this goofy lady!
Red! will you keep quiet?
you shouldn't even be here if you're not going to behave!
hey, if you're really going to give this doofus a name just for helping you, I wanna be here for it!
you're lucky she's totally awesome at tricking people.


please just try to keep quiet .


It . worked?
I - looks like it
Jeanne and the others must be in the illusion by now.
Good thing you're here. . Parley teleported everyone to exactly the right place.
that's the plan, but we don't have much time.
does your machine work?


Click Click
Ping
phew...
It's getting something
We're off
are you going to be okay?
we'll see.

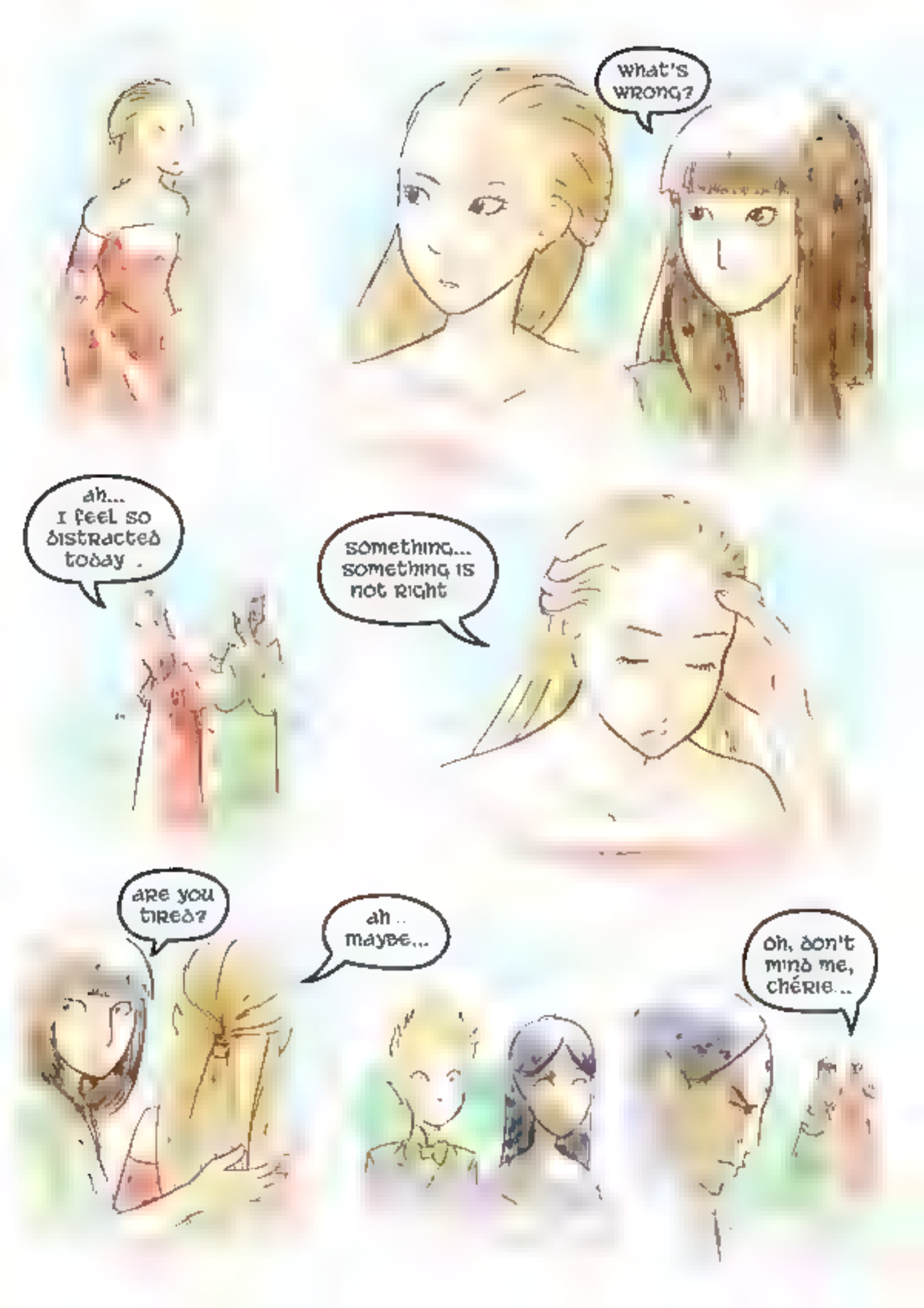

Ping
Ping
annie, I can't guarantee that I'll be able to detect anything
the ARROW in the water is somehow keeping jeanne trapped remotely.
so it has to be emitting something.
yeah.... yeah.
isn't there anything in diego's notes?
I'll take a look...
this will be an important part of the plan. I know you'll figure it out.
Ping
Ping

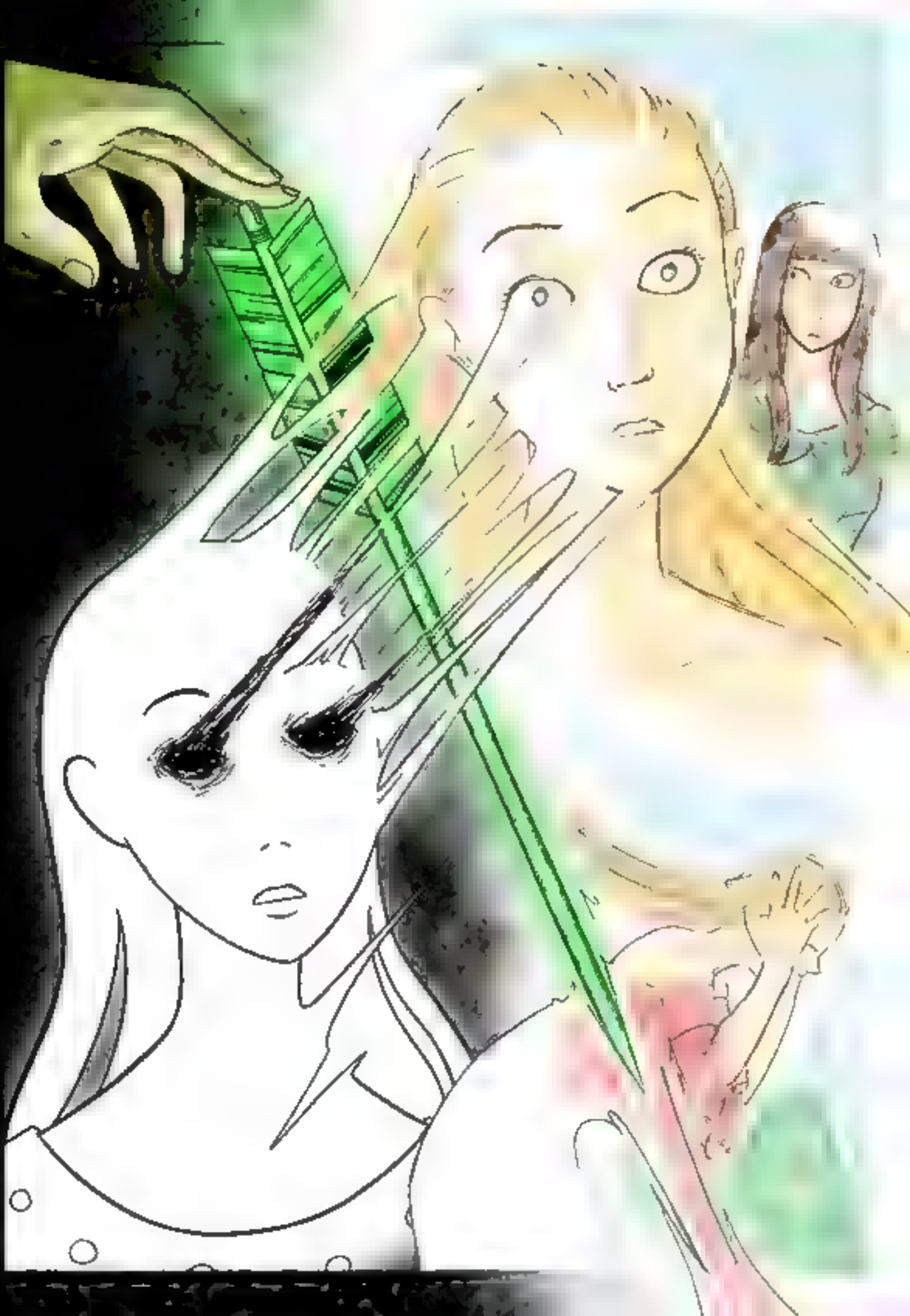

annie.
annie?
kat you found it?
yeah... I think so.
I knew you could do it!
mm!
and the enclosure?
it's all synced with the tracker.


well then, down I go!
annie
Squeeze





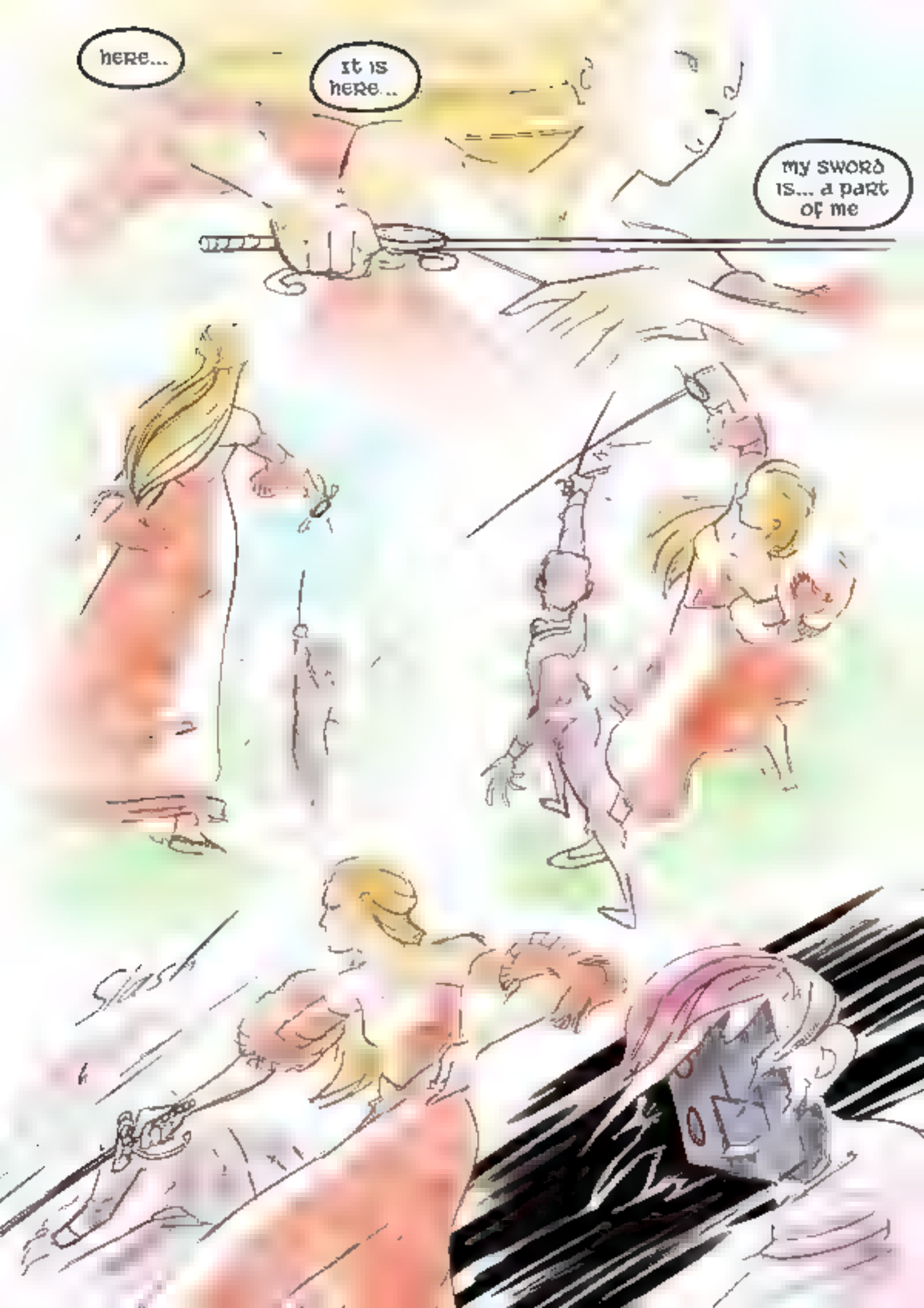

What's wrong?
ah... I feel so distracted today .
something... something is not right
are you tired?
ah .. maybe...
oh, don't mind me, chérie...




no .
something is happening!
this is not ~
~ this is not what I am!
someone is down here with me!


She's flippin' out!
Keep hold of her!
I'm trying!
George! Be careful!
Jeanne! Be calm! e-everything's okay!
no...
Something is here!


what are you?!
fast!
my sword.
where is my sword?


here...
it is here...
my sword is... a part of me

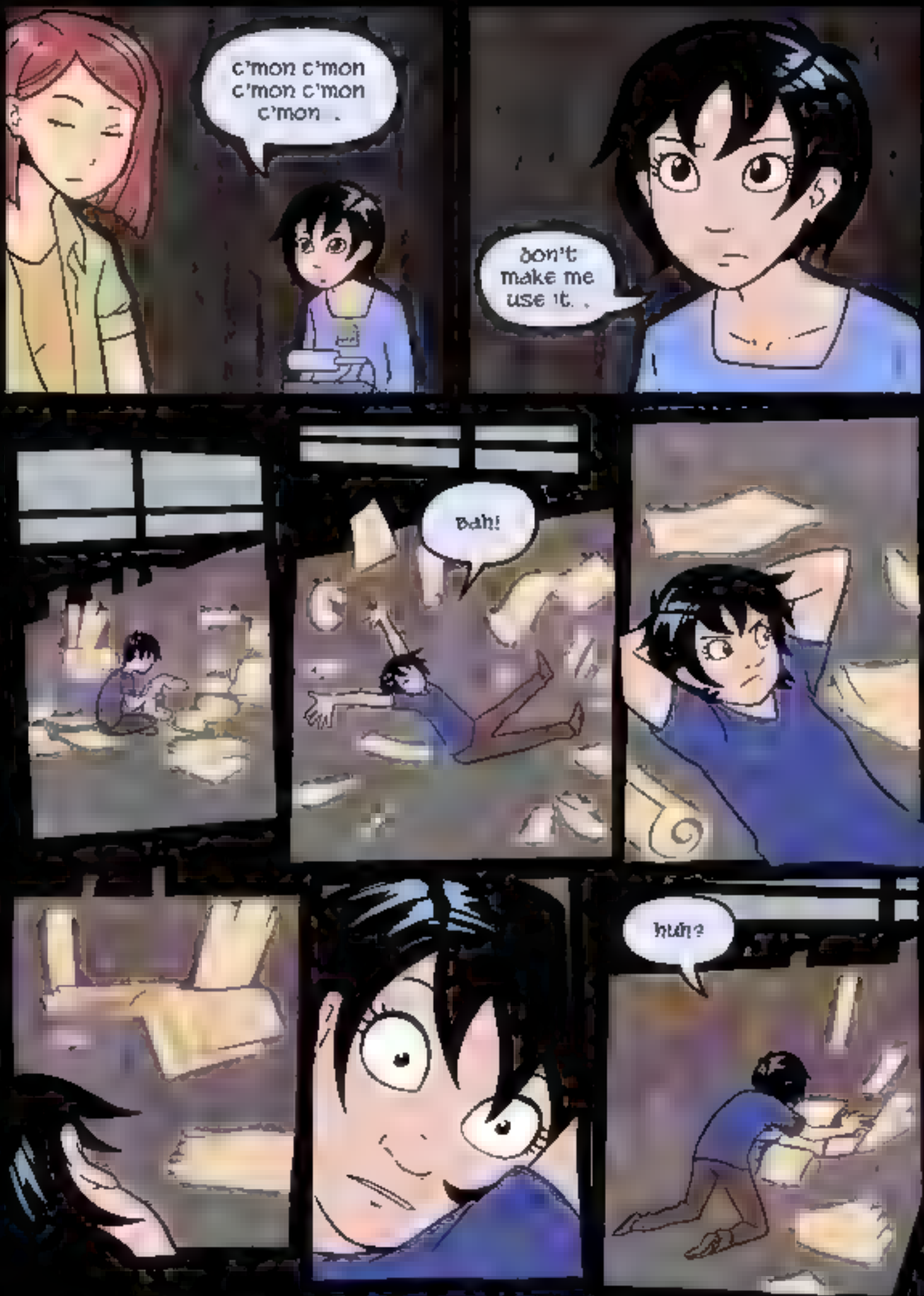


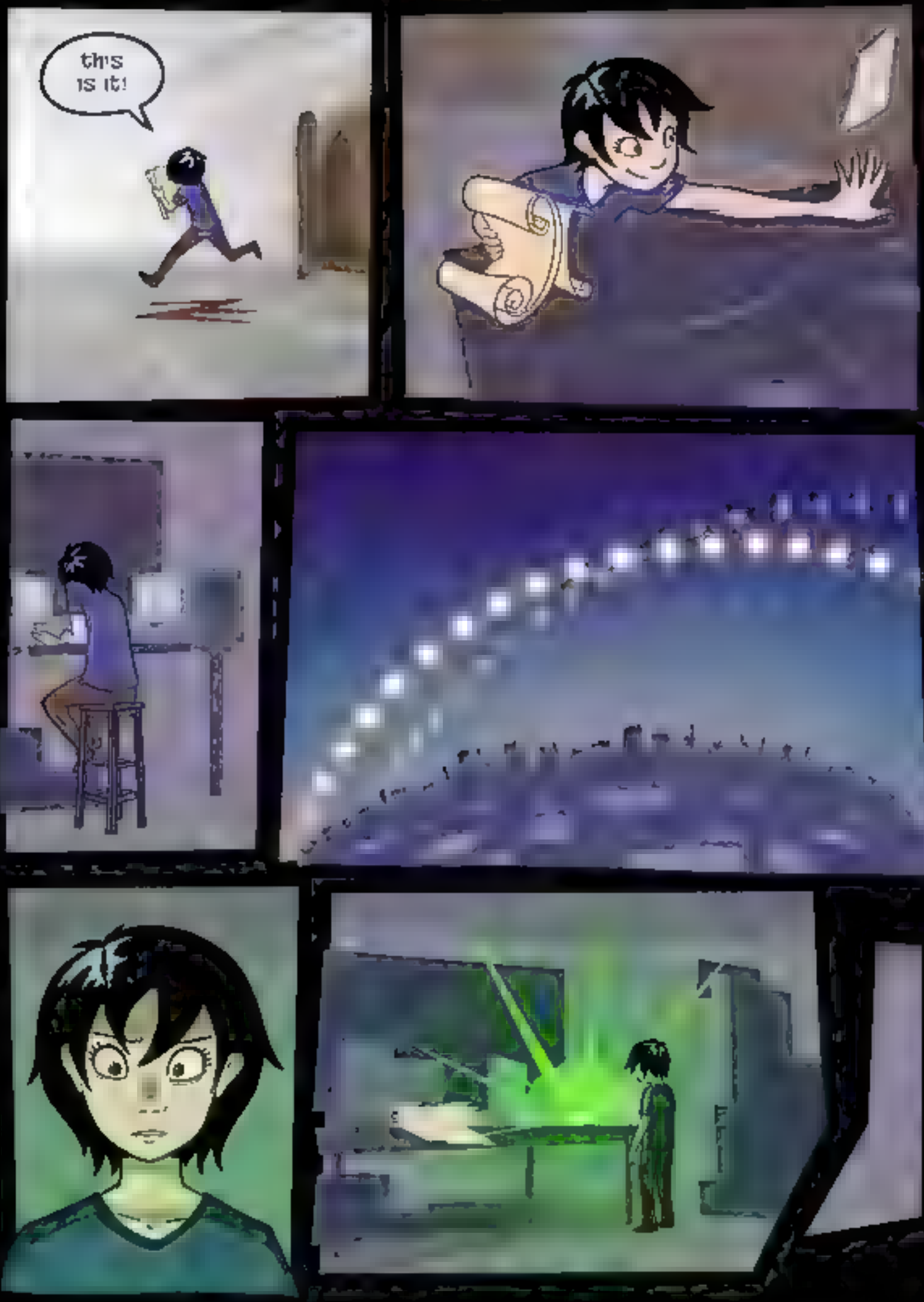



It's you!
you're Jeanne's ~
no! stop!




It's like a maze!
Is that how he's being held here?
But if I can't get out...
Our plan won't work!


c'mon c'mon
c'mon c'mon
c'mon .
don't
make me
use it. .
bah!
huh?


th's
is it!


a monster?!
no! one of diego's machines?
CLANG


I - I can't keep hold of her when she's fighting!


WHAM
GEORGE?!
Why would you attack me?!

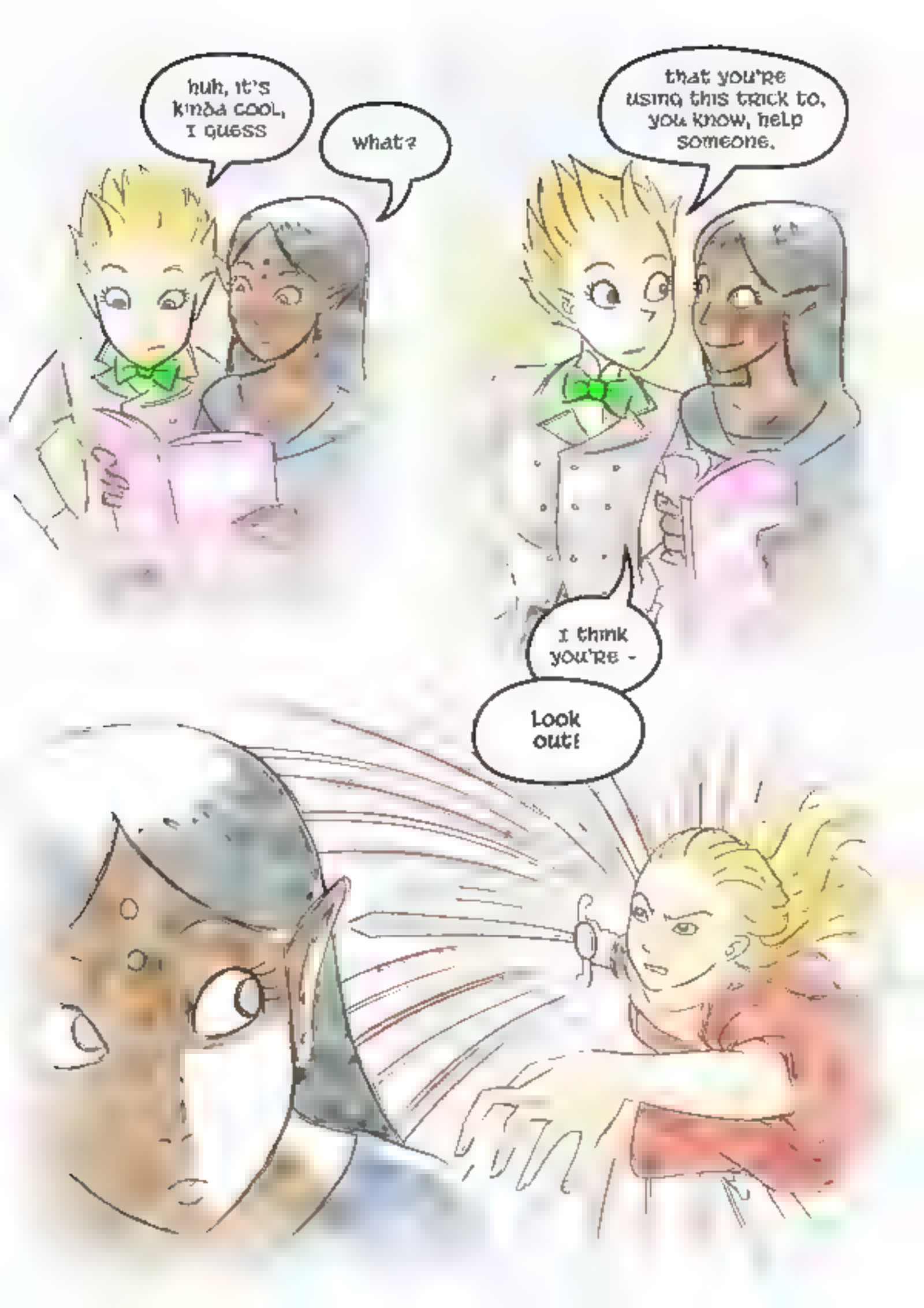

Okay, she's distracted!
Get her back!
my friend!
Why are you doing this?!
Come on, Annie...
If she regains control, I don't stand a chance...


what is all this?
some kind of machine?


some of these parts can move...
but they don't make any sense!
I don't know what to do!


she has a dragonslayer's power?
since when...
no.
I do not know this woman...
something else is at play here


there was someone else here...
those girls!
a fae trick?
they're affecting my mind!


huh, it's kinda cool, I guess
what?
that you're using this trick to, you know, help someone.
I think you're -
Look out!




that that should have been a clean hit.
how could I possibly miss?
th-that's lucky you were kneeling the whole time!


dammit!
I am free of that illusion .
but ..
what else...


Snip
I do remember you, coward heart.
now, with no tricks, no deception...
we will fight.


they've started fighting...
okay, this has gone on long enough.



